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WAY BACK WHEN

Long ago and far away, across oceans and many countries and thousands of miles, this is the story of Way Back When

By Betty Unterecht Drang

Introduction

This is not fiction or a love story but rather one family's struggle to survive two evil systems: Hitler's and Stalin's. The pain, the horrors, punishments; no one can put this on paper nor can words really express what we went through. With all that I consider our family one of the lucky ones. My parents were not burned in Hitler's ovens or thrown into Stalin's jails. Most of us survived this Hell.

Living With Memories

In a war the body shrinks and the soul fades. Hunger and sickness take control of your very existence. In the end, your life is compacted into a single wish: to die as quickly as possible. In a time like this you can't control the emotions. Quickly, you learn about hate and brutality. We, the Holocaust survivors, know too well about this. Survivors sniff out each other the way animals do. We are drawn to each other and yet, at the same time, we flee from one another because some of us feel it's better to bury the memories and the past.

For years we suppressed the horrors and sick feelings that just won't go away, all because of memories. Speaking about memories, it's fair to mention that memories act for us like double agents. They are to some degree priceless and are cherished like very expensive gifts. They prove to be blessings at times and the process of remembering them is often therapeutic. Memories also work through life-long problems, often resolving personal conflicts. Memories have not only impact on life but in many ways they take you way back and the long-ago lights up. Some memories even take you back as far as you can remember.

The few good memories that I have, I try to hang on to. And it is like entering heaven, for a while at least. Those better days: not only do you cherish them, but they help you to go on living.

How do I deal with this memoir? So many times I try not to look back and wish to remember less, but something stops me from doing it. Just the opposite happens. There is this drive in me that tells me now is the time to take inventory of the happenings that took place in my life. The picture is not pretty. How do I deal with it? In the first place it is so difficult to write about horrors and it is practically not possible to write about everything. That's when I stop. Whom shall I leave out?

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How do I determine which are the more important stories to write? I feel sick when I have to make these decisions and selections; but sicker when I don't.

I wonder, will this torture ever leave me, or will this be a part of me till the end of my life? Is this called self-inflicted pain? Perhaps. And why did I choose certain stories over others? I honestly don't know. I wish I could be more specific about the loss of loved ones, but all the details are not known to me. It took me a long time to gather some information but ,as a survivor and an eye-witness, I was able to put this book together. Once I began to write, it was hard to put the pen down, even though I only scratched the surface of my story.

Life, Jewish problems in Poland, and so many relatives - these are really the forgotten ones. The heroes of our generation, those fantastic and intelligent Jewish youths, full of life, with an indescribable strength and such a lust for life - all are gone, all are ashes. How do I deal with this?

To write a story such as this one does not require research - all the happenings, the tragedies, pain are very much sealed in my heart forever. Why do I worry about stories that will never be written? Why do I worry about those who deny the Shoah? I have no answers. To write a book of this nature, I knew I would have to endure chills to my spine, a lot of tears, face reality and cope with stress. I overcame all the above. It was not easy to do it.

This is the story of my great grandparents as I know it, at least some of it. For some reason little babies did not survive infancy. Was there a medical problem? Perhaps. Of all the children in her family my grandmother was the only survivor. Needless to say the frustration on the part of her parents was great as they went from rabbi to rabbi for help and *brochos* (blessings.) One of the rabbis suggested that when my grandmother reaches the age of nine she should become engaged only to a young yeshiva *buchur* (boy) who is an orphan. So the search began for a suitable candidate. My *bubbie's* name was Chaya, taken from *chai*, life. My *zaida's* name was Shalom Shachna. He was named after a famous rabbi. They married when Chaya was fifteen and Sholom Shachna was seventeen. They raised six children; three boys and three girls, and here is their story.

The couple settled down in a very small town named Laszczow surrounded by small towns and villages. The language they spoke was called *Chachlacky*, a cross between Russian and Ukrainian. This enabled my mother later in life to pick up Polish, Russian and Ukrainian. Mom was the first born. Her name was Mala Roza. Then came Yosel Feivish, then Motel, Malka, Rochel, and Laibish. All of them had two names, but I don't know them all. My mother and three nieces were the only ones who survived the war. Her sisters and brothers were all married and I don't know the names or ages of their children. They all escaped from Poland to the Ukraine, and there they lost their lives at the hands of the German beasts with the help of the Ukrainians. We later learned that in the town of Vinica where they all lived and died, a thousand women and children were shot and buried in one grave. Among them was my bubba Chaya who was seventy-two years of age. It was near Babi Yar; the year was 1942 or 43.

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Mom and How I Remember Her

Her name was Mala Roza bas Sholom Shachna. Her mother's name was Chaya and she was a real *aishas chayil* (woman of valor). Because her family was a special and unusual, one with a dynasty background, it makes it that much harder to write about it. There were three beautiful sisters and three handsome brothers in the family. One can only say that was a gift from G-d. Not only could they all carry a tune, more than that, the brothers *davened* in *shuls* as *chazanim* all of their lives. Of course they did it not for money but as a service to the Jewish community. When they sang people in town stood by the windows listening with amazement and joy.

Mom was the oldest and the most extraordinarily talented. A self-educator, intelligent, a do-it-yourself passionate person, she was also a sharing individual with an indescribably brilliant mind. Mala Roza means "a little rose that never stops blooming at any age." She was our "rose" to the end. *Hashem* made up for all their losses and gave them six special human beings. They had good looks, intelligence, and indescribable talents and they served G-d and mankind: a very close family. Mom was loved and respected by all of them. Zaida became a *shochet* (meat slaughterer) and Chaya ran a grocery store.

Mom loved her family and she had a special respect for her parents. Chaya and Shalom Shachna had no parents or sisters and brothers. Mom carried a special torch for her father in her heart. Is it because she had pity on him, that such a special person was to be left alone at such an early age? Coincidentally Mom and her father died at the same age. Later in life he gave up his profession due to poor vision, but he died after taking a swim under icy waters in the wintertime. He was a fantastic swimmer but he died from pneumonia. To my sorrow we don't have pictures of them.

I can't forget how many times I found Mom in the role of a doctor, saving lives. She saved her own son Yosel from having his leg amputated. She cooked and prepared medicines. She also performed a delicate medical procedure by burning off a "rose" (red patch) from her daughter Ethel's face. She strove to protect us from childhood sicknesses. Most children did not survive due to poverty and other difficulties, but she worked very hard to see that we all survived. I remember our neighbor, Mindel. One day while cooking jam she had an accident. The jam wound up on her body. The neighbor called for my mother and she told her family what to do. When they suggested a professional doctor, Mindel said "only Mala Roza will touch me." After the neighbor healed, there was not a trace of a burn. Very soon my Mother became very popular. She touched and saved so many lives.

My mother was the most fascinating woman in the world. How can I forget the hardships she went through? Education was number one on her agenda and all her children were talented, especially her oldest son, Chaim. Perhaps another Einstein was not far away, but because of lack of money and being a Jew, he had no chance to develop his talents. Her famous story was about Chaim, who had decided to play the violin. Where was the money to come from to buy the instrument and then to pay for lessons? But Chaim knew what to do. He made one himself but it almost cost him his life. One day, my Uncle Yosel, came to visit her with a beautiful

horse. Chaim pulled strings out of the horse's tail for the violin, but the horse kicked him, nearly killing him. However, the violin came out perfect and play it he did. I still remember the look on my mother's face every time she talked about this incident.

Another famous "Chaim story" that comes to mind is when he enrolled himself into the Polish army. My Mother opposed it, but he did it anyway. He wanted to find out first hand what army life was all about, especially as a Jew surrounded by so many anti-Semites. He even assured my mother that if he couldn't handle it, he would find a way get out. Chaim, who did not look Jewish and spoke a perfect Polish, soon found out the truth. Slowly he began his plan to get out.

When he was a kid he had found a live bullet while playing in the backyard of the *cheder* (Jewish school). He tried to take it apart (for scientific reasons) when suddenly it went off, wounding the rabbi and a few students as well as one finger of his hand on which he lost a nail. He now inflicted a wound to the same finger. He was hospitalized and did not let the finger heal. He was released from the army on the assumption that the wound to his finger was incurable. This was my genius brother Chaim!

The year was 1936. Life became more and more difficult. The Polish anti-Semites made life miserable. Worse than that, the oldest daughter, Ethel, who suffered from tuberculosis, passed away at the age of twenty-nine. This, despite all the money spent to save her. She left a husband and two young sons, ages seven and ten. As a result my Mother took all of us to be tested for tuberculosis. Thank G-d, none of us got this disease. My Mother knew how to protect us.

The second daughter, Pearl, married and settled in a town named Chrubieshow, fifty kilometers from us. This was considered far. She also had two boys, one age six. The second one was born right before the war broke out so none of us saw him. The grandchildren were the love of my Mother's life.

A tragedy occurred a short time later. The biggest fire in the history of our city broke out. Our Polish neighbors watched but did nothing to help as our own house burned to the ground. We found ourselves homeless and helpless. Everyone waited for my Mother's plans and decisions My Mother carried a tremendous load on her shoulders, but as soon as we found an apartment we moved to the other side of the city. We had to share it with another couple and that was not so great. Life became a constant struggle and so it was decided that the time had come for Chaim, Yosel, Yitzhak and Mirl to leave the nest and seek employment in larger cities.

My sister Rivka and I were the two youngest ones and we remained at home with our parents. We were both finished with school and we too worked and helped out. Now and then the children would all come home, but the happiness was short-lived. My mother worried constantly and the silence in the house took its toll on her. In fact she became so ill, she nearly died. Bubba Chaya came to us and helped us cope with the difficult situation. It was before Passover and Bubbie Chaya had to go home. Slowly my mother recuperated, but we never saw my grandmother again.

The year was 1937. My father decided to rebuild the house. In spite of our objections, he went ahead. We never saw the finished house. Our Polish neighbors finished it and moved in. Life went on; there were weddings, births and deaths. Once I could not help overhearing a conversation my mother had with one of our

neighbors. She said: "Look at our beautiful Jewish youth, what will become of them? I wonder how many talents will be lost without having a chance to develop. How many could become doctors, lawyers, scholars, teachers and other important professionals? There is already an overflow of shoemakers, carpenters, painters, and dressmakers." At that time poverty seemed bigger and bigger and so was the unemployment. So many would have liked to leave Poland and some did go to America, Australia and other countries. Some sold their parents' possessions just for a ticket. For some it was the last time they saw their families.

The year 1938 was no different from the year before except that everyone got older. Also in 1938, on a student reduced-price ticket, my mother sent me to spend the summer with my sister Pearl and her family. I had such a good time playing with my little nephew, Sholom Schachna, who was named after my zaida. Pearl always took care of me. To her I was the "kid sister." After I delivered all the news, she asked me how much Ethel had suffered before she died. I expected that question since they were very close. I don't remember exactly what I said, but we cried for a long time. The summer came to an end and it was time to say good-bye. She hugged and kissed me like never before. Little did I know that I would never see her again. Later we found out that she put up a fight with the German soldiers when they came to take the children away. She was brutally murdered.

By the time 1939 arrived, Europe began to smell from smoke. On September 1, 1939, the smoke turned into an inferno. Three weeks into the war the Germans marched in and occupied our town, Zamosc. Let me tell you something about the town in which we were born and which we loved. Zamocsc lies in southeastern Poland. Because of its beauty it is often referred to as the Padua of the North. Zamosc was founded in 1518 by Jan Zamojsky, after whom the town in named.

Jews lived in Poland around 1000 years. Many famous Jews lived in Zamosc, like the writer Y.L. Peretz,m the founder of modern Yiddish literature. In fact, the street we lived on was named after him. Another famous Jew who lived here was Isaac Bashevis Singer and the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg. The architecture in the center of the town was absolutely gorgeous. We also had poor neighborhoods; that's where the ghettos were later on. The city hall was the tallest building with a huge clock on top that kept reminding us how fast time flies. There was a very famous and beautiful park with a sign at the top which said: "No Jews and dogs allowed." There were only three cities in Poland built the same way, Poznian and Krakow. All were done by one Italian designer named Bernardo Morando.

As soon as the German marched in we were ordered to come out of the hiding places. There was searching, pushing, shooting, and shoving from one side of the backyard to the other. The first order was to lay down all the weapons. My mother was asked if she had some weapons and she answered in German that women don't carry weapons. The German soldier said to her "You speak German." He then pushed her towards a brick wall. Her face was bleeding. We all looked and were told not to move or they would shoot us. Thank G-d she was not killed.

The first day with the Germans hundreds of people were killed. This went on all the time. The killing was done in between looting stores of jewelry, leather goods, fur coats and furniture. No stone was left unturned. No one knew what to do. Chaos and confusion took over our lives. The Jewish calendar showed that it was time for

the Jewish High Holidays, but soon it became the time for the killing fields. Conversations were made in whispers. By now we were with the Germans a few weeks. Because of the curfew, the dead had to wait to be buried.

Suddenly the Germans packed up and marched out of the city. We were all in shock. Not knowing what to expect and before we could bury the dead, the Russian army moved in. Here again no one knew what to expect, but it was a relief for about 10 days. We tried to figure out what would come next and before we turned around the Russians began to pack up and take with them whatever the German had left. They told us that the Germans were coming back and we now knew what those beasts stood for. Whoever could leave town, did so.

At that time my mother decided that we too would leave. She became so busy; there was not much time. We were expecting the Germans back at any time. My mother packed some warm clothes and an extra pair of shoes for my sister Rivka and me. The others did their own packing. I remember my brother Yitzhak came home from Warsaw just to be with us. It took him a week to get home. There was no transportation so he hitchhiked and walked. He looked so tired and sick. Unfortunately he did not have enough time to recuperate when it was again time for him to run. My father packed his *tallit* and *tefillin* and the prayer books first. That was more important to him than anything else. He took some clothes and that was all. The exodus to the unknown began with a rain that lasted three days. My mother's decision was that she and Chaim would stay behind a little longer and hopefully they would be able to save whatever was possible. A promised horse and carriage was given to my brother, Chaim. So we left Zamosc, never to return.

We marched alongside the Russian army with blisters on our feet, cold and hungry and so tired. I was without my Mother for the first time in my life. I grew up so fast it was as though I had never been a kid. I was homeless and I missed my Mother terribly. I felt like half of my body was missing. Holding back tears and pains, we marched on with the rest of the family, each of us with the same thoughts: where to and what next? Where are my mother and Chaim? Are they alive?

What happened to my Mother and my brother Chaim was that they got a horse and a carriage, but the horse was good only for marching in military parades. In no time the horse took off, galloping away, and leaving them alone in the woods at night. Chaim had no choice but to leave my Mother in the forest while he went looking to buy another horse. My Mother was so afraid she could hardly talk about this bitter experience.

One of the hardest decisions facing us was deciding which direction to take. Sister Mirl was in Lwow which meant going with the Russian army for protection. Sister Pearl lived in the opposite direction, towards the Germans, and that was even riskier. There was no communication of any kind. We had hoped that Pearl and her family would run toward the Russian border, but that was not the case. As I mentioned previously, we never saw them again.

Finally we reached Lwow. My sister Mirl was living with my cousin's family and working. By the way, this cousin, Itchy Handelsman, was raised in our house. Mom took care of him. After his marriage he went out on his own and became very wealthy. Lwow was swollen with refugees. The situation was terrible. There were no apartments and nothing to be had. Our first stop was to see our sister and try to

find a place for us to live. What we got was one night of rest, some food, and nothing else. The next day we started looking for a place to live. We found a bombed house that was dangerous to walk into with water coming out of the pipes and loose bricks falling down from everywhere. Finally, Mom and Chaim arrived. She was very disappointed. She said to us, "We are on our own and we'll do the best we can." After a few days Mom got sick. She could not bear the cold and the wetness.

In the meantime, the Russians began a registration and arrested people who were not residents of Lwow, shipping them off to Russia. Without a fight, Mom gave in, and a disappointed mother took her family off to Russia. Our destination: Ukrainia. We stopped in a town called Xerson, a big industrial city on the shores of the Dniepr River. It was connected to the Black Sea, and both were used for transportation only. To me, Mom looked a though she had aged within a short time.

Unquestionably Xerson was a welcome change. We were given an apartment, but had to share the kitchen with others. We were placed in jobs in a factory, which was built on the edge of the river. Our factory produced glass jars. My brother Yosel became a laboratory technician. He brought home glass dishes that Mom used for cooking. For a little while it was like a miracle. Then Chaim and Yitzhak were taken away to work in the Dombas coal mines. That was Auschwitz, the Russian version. G-d only knows how they survived. Sisters Mirl and Rivka worked three shifts at the glass factory. The midnight shift was the worst. My dad was a watchman: daytime only. He carried a rifle that could not shoot, thank G-d. I once asked him if the job was boring. He said, "I am so busy praying that I don't have time to be bored." I worked in a candy factory and Rivka and I attended evening classes. The transportation to and from school was a pain in the neck. The school rewarded us with a few crackers and a glass of plain seltzer. Most of the time we drank the water and brought the crackers home. On days when there was no bread the crackers came in handy.

It was almost the end of the year, 1939. While people in Russia prepared to welcome in the New Year 1940, my family suffered in silence. We worried about my two brothers who were taken to the coal mines. There was no news from them nor those we left back home either. We lived in the dark and there were long lines for food. The situation in general was tense; newcomers disappeared. Communism meant no freedom and with it came a lot of problems, including learning a new language and obeying very strict rules. Everyday brought new instructions from Mom about how to live through the difficulties. She never stopped planning, and because of her instructions, we were able to keep the family together and were not arrested or tortured yet. But Mom had no peace. She cried constantly for her mother, her children and grandchildren, and everyone else in the family

After a few months in Dombas, Chaim and Yitzhak came home. I wish I could describe the horrors they went through, but I can't. Very soon they were placed in other jobs: Chaim in a bakery whose bread was only for the military. Yitzhak's job was painting military underwater ships. One year later they were both married, but within a short time they were taken away to the army. That separation lasted for over twenty years.

Another experience in Xerson: one day the house began to shake. The pots and pans bumped into each other making a lot of noise. Mom was the first one to

know what happened. She told us to run out of the house to the street because the shaking was due to an earthquake. At first we didn't believe her, but running down the stairs we felt the building shake and broken glass fell on our heads. Outside, the ground split and we had to jump over the cracks and run from the building. Lying on the shaky ground I can say that it was a horrifying experience. Again, Mom was there for us and she was right.

Eventually we were faced with the problem of Russian citizenship. Many refugees did not want to become citizens, but Mom felt we would be safer if we did. Those who didn't disappeared very soon, and we never knew what happened to them. So Mom did not rest, she was constantly planning ahead. Looking at her you could see that she not only aged outwardly but also was tormented inside. Survival was number one on her agenda.

One day in April of 1941, she decided to return to Poland to see her mother and bring her to us. She worked out the plan herself. Rumor had it that a lot of people going back to Poland from Russia were being reunited with the families and life was back to normal. Without permission she took off by herself. As soon as she reached Poland, she telegrammed us to stay put and not to follow her. She tried to rescue her mother, but it was too late. Mother and daughter never saw each other again. My *bubbie* vanished and is now among the six million *kadoshim* (holy people). My mother, on the other hand, had to figure out how to get back to her family. Without a pass or documents, she faced the impossible and eventually landed in jail. The frustration and the conditions in jail were unbearable. One young man who could not cope found a way out – he hung himself in front of my mother. She had tried to talk him out of it, but was not successful. It was so crowded in jail that there was no place to lie down. After she was released she managed to stop in Lwow and visit our cousins in an effort to save them, but they refused to leave Poland. None of them survived.

It took my mother a long time to come home. What she witnessed and what she went through is impossible to describe. The journey was enough to make one's blood run cold, but only she could tell her story. The happiest day in our lives was when she got back to Ukrainia. She was very tired and heartbroken and could not bounce back.

Time and the summer seemed to move so fast. I was released from my job and had a benign lump removed from under my left arm, both at the same time. A few weeks later we were getting ready to run again because war broke out and, unable to get medication, I was in lots of pain. Thank G-d, Mom was there for me. It was now the summer of 1941, and the air was full of sadness. The Russian radio, which had only one station, kept playing military marches and patriotic songs. Outside on the streets military machinery and soldiers were constantly on the march. A short time later, in July 1941, the radio announced that Germany had declared war against Russia. We were now faced with new uncertainties as this latest chapter of the war began.

Russia was not Poland. It was a big strong country and Stalin was another Hitler. It killed us as we watched Mom tearing herself to pieces while Hitler pushed toward Ukrainia. Planning ahead was impossible.

We found ourselves living in a war zone. Everyday Stalin was issuing new orders and restrictions. Our neighbors were all Ukrainians and we were the only Jewish family in the building. We developed a silent language, talking with our eyes, and living in total fear. The big picture of Joseph Stalin that we were forced to keep in our house was a constant reminder that he was the mirror image of Hitler.

Without being able to say goodbye, my older and younger brothers were taken into the army. In spite of all this, everyone went to work. In a very short time German airplanes, sometimes as many as eighteen, bombarded us at one time. This went on day and night for weeks. There was no place to hide. The basement was not safe and so we hid behind the walls of the building and watched the dog fights in the air. Mom would cover us with her hands and body, hoping that none of us would be hit. The Russians were not doing so well and rumors of an evacuation began to spread, but no one knew where or when.

Finally, Stalin's order came to gather the livestock and bring them alongside the river Dniepr, where we lived. Every factory had to be taken apart, the machinery packed in cattle cars and the rest blown away. We watched the livestock, unattended, dying from hunger. We were in the dark We hoped to be chosen to guard the machinery since that was the only way of surviving, otherwise we would be left to the Germans and Ukrainians. To our amazement we were chosen, and for the moment that was a small miracle. Of course, everything has a price. Our lives were at stake, so in order to get us to our destination we were responsible for everything that was loaded on the cattle cars. G-d help us if one of the Ukrainians who was traveling with us would decide otherwise and destroy the transport. As it was, they were not happy to be with us. They would rather have stayed home to welcome Hitler with open arms. This was their hope.

The next few weeks were all but miraculous. The German rockets lit up the skies, bombing and shelling us without an end, day and night. Because we could not use the stations that went through towns, we used the old railroads that were rusted, weak and very dangerous to ride. At times it seemed that heaven and earth collided. The motormen ran the trains at such speeds that we had to hold the machinery with our bare hands to keep it from falling and crushing us to death. My parents did not stop praying to survive the journey. Our "guardians" were the real Bolsheviks, the NKGB, and the other Ukrainians who were the Nazi sympathizers. The train ride was so frightening that it was impossible to stop my heart from beating fast. I could hear other people's hearts, who happened to be 10 feet away, beating fast too.

We could not wait for this journey to be over and, most of all, to bring the machinery to its destination in one piece. Our lives depended on it. At times we felt like screaming and crying or talking to someone. Mom saw the frustration on our faces. She looked at us as though she meant to say, "Remember my teachings. No anger in public, small conversation, if any, and no complaints or questions." To me, it seemed as though we would be in this miserable situation forever. My mind kept asking if we would ever live through this. I also thought how nice it would be lying next to Mom in a warm house, in a comfortable bed..

After weeks of being stuffed in the cattle car, the train slowed down. Our eyes met at once. What did this mean? Were we caught by the Germans? There was nothing but deadly silence. A while later a Russian came into the car and told us we

were in a safe zone. The Germans were far from us and soon we would be given some food. Our bodies, stiff from holding the machinery, felt as though falling bricks had hit us, so we received this news with gladness. We were given food: bread, hot water, and some marmalade. They allowed us to take some time to answer nature's call. All this did not mean that the war or the journey was over for us.

Another few days passed and we reached the Volga River. Our train came to a stop. Some Soviet officials came in and took it over. We were ordered to go into small boats with our belongings. All of this happened, of course, in the middle of a cold night. There were so many people, the little boats filled up rather quickly. We found a little corner and sat down on the floor. We were all tired, hungry and filthy, but quiet. To our surprise they announced that whoever stood in line would get some cooked food. All I can remember is that Adek Bialoglowski stood in line, but none of us had the strength to do it. It took a long time to get the food, and what we got was farina. Who could ever forget that taste!

In the meantime, my brother Yosel was not with us. He went off the boat to see if he could buy bread and did not come back. The boat began to move and he missed it. I was hysterical, but Mom did not show how panicked she was, trying to keep her fear all to herself. She told me he would get on the next boat, and he did. None of us slept. Firstly, because there were not enough places on the boat to stretch out, secondly, we were also afraid because stealing was very prevalent, and lastly, because the lice attacked out bodies without mercy.

One day the boat stopped and we were told to gather our belongings. We were getting off. Again, it was in the middle of a cold night. The city we came to was Kuybechow. We were left on the street and waited for morning to see what would come next. We were hoping to be placed somewhere inside a house, but that was not to be the case. Our problems had only just begun. There we were, homeless, living on the street, without a roof over our heads. There was no place to hide from the freezing night and the rain. We had no warm clothes, no place to wash, and no toilets. We did not know how to protect ourselves from the "night people," the prostitutes and drunks. Most of all, we could not protect ourselves from the wounded Russian soldiers who had been abandoned by their own society. They were not afraid, not even of Joseph Stalin! Their lives were over. These men were never without a deadly weapon and the only way for them to survive was to kill, and they did just that. Whether it was for a jacket, shoes, money, or anything they wanted, nobody's life had any meaning to them and we were the best targets. Nobody protected us, nobody cared, and we were absolutely helpless. Every time they passed us by, I could hear Mom's heart beat harder. But, with the grace of G-d, we survived 10 days and nights in the streets.

At least we had bread, but how we got it is another story, of another miracle. Once, after standing in an impossibly long line for three days waiting for some bread, a fire broke out. Everybody ran away from the fire, choking with thick smoke. But I decided to move toward the fire, toward the bread. I was so frustrated. I was cold and hungry and wet, and also choking with the smoke, but in my mind, I decided I had nothing to lose but to attempt to get the bread. When I reached the window of the bakery the saleslady couldn't get over it. I was filthy. The rain had

mixed with the smoke and had formed a black cream over my face. "You made it," she said admiringly, and as a reward gave me three kilos of bread - a loaf that looked like a wagon wheel. When I brought the bread to my family on the street, they too couldn't get over it. However, the bread tasted from the smoke. My Mom joked and said, "It tastes like smoked fish," but that bread saved our lives.

A few days later, we found out that we could choose where we preferred to go – Siberia (cold) or Asia (warm). Of course, after freezing to death, we chose Asia. But where would we be placed? The trip looked like all the others with the same inhumane conditions, but we hoped and dreamed of a place we could call "home." For a short while even Mom was excited, but with caution. She always managed to smile. However, a dream is only that, a dream. Russia was everywhere, Asia or no Asia. After a couple of weeks of travel, tired and out of patience, we reached the capital of Uzbekistan, in Tashkent, Asia. It was 1941. Welcome to Hell!

When we arrived in Tashkent we were placed in a park. At night we made our beds on the benches that people had left; otherwise we sat on the grass. We were on our own again without food or supervision, waiting for some news. For a few days nobody looked at us. Again we had to deal with the "night people." Mom sat close trying to protect us, and at night we clung tightly together. My brother Yosel became the provider, often leaving the park to look for food. One day he brought us some news. A lot of people were on their own, looking for jobs and places to live. They were all in a temporary house and he had even met some people from home that he knew. Without hesitation, we joined them and moved in.

The house looked like a jail, but we were so tired we didn't care. Tashkent had a lot of Jews, even religious ones. They called themselves Buchara Jews and they spoke Hebrew and Russian. They wanted to help us and they told us the truth. They warned us to stay in Tashkent. They also told us we had to be registered, but that was not possible. Nobody in Russia can do whatever he or she wants. Everyone belongs to Stalin and his regime. With a passport and a number we were the so-called "undesirable public enemies," at the mercy of Stalin.

The house turned out to be worse than the park. The hostility, filth, and the lack of privacy because of the many people, made the situation unbearable. The Russians also had figured out what happened to the refugees. They eventually found us and raided the house and arrested some of the people. We never saw them again. Every night we had to jump off the balcony and hide in the bushes.

Mom had enough. She was petrified of being arrested and separated from us. Time passed, it was autumn. Dad was busy writing a new *luach* (Jewish calendar) so we would know when the High Holidays would be that year and if it would be possible to observe them. Mom had mixed feelings, however, only happy that days had passed and we were still together. The rest of us wondered how much more of this she could take. Her beautiful face had definitely changed. She had nearly stopped living, but was trying to survive for us. Her biggest fear was that she would have to bury anyone of us before she died. On the other hand we were ready to do anything not to have to bury our parents in this forsaken place. Mom had made up her mind, if they do come and arrest us we will give up and go wherever they send us. And that's exactly how it happened.

We did not know much about Asia nor the native Uzbeks, but there is much to write about them. Theirs was such a different way of life, customs and language from ours in Europe. I could not believe that time could go backward so much. Women wore black veils covering their faces and long dresses with no style whatsoever. Also, they did not wear any shoes. Their homes were nothing more than boxes with no windows, no furniture, no running water or plumbing, no stoves on which to cook nor sinks in which to wash. Water was the biggest problem for us. Humans and animals used the same polluted water that caused all kinds of sicknesses. The climate was yet another problem. On a clear day you could see as far as your eyes would allow. The temperature would go up to 110 or 120 degrees. There was no place to hide because the land was completely flat.

There was one tree that we called "the hospital." Only if you collapsed or were struck by malaria were you allowed to lie under that tree. The skin on our bodies was covered with blisters, but we soon learned that we had to cover ourselves completely no matter how hot it was. During the day we suffered from the heat as well as from starvation. At night, our bodies suffered from the lice and mosquitoes. We suffered like this for four and one-half years. If this was not hell, then what was?

One day the Russians came and packed us into crowded trucks with other people. This activity was familiar. So off we went. The road was dusty, bumpy and uncomfortable, but nobody complained, always swallowing our pride. After a few hours we came to a collective farm, *Galodna Step*, which in Russian means "hungry desert." It was exactly like its name. The so-called houses were no bigger than doghouses. They each had one little window, no beds, and only a platform from wall to wall. It was very difficult for my parents, but we had no choice.

Mom began to look over this place and think about how she could improve it, but we ran into many difficulties. We did not know anything about the climate and the language. Everything was new, but Mom remembered one thing about which she constantly reminded us: "This is still Stalin's country so the road is the same. Nothing has changed, only the suffering is worse."

We had arrived at a time when the cotton harvest was in full swing so we were immediately placed in jobs. We picked cotton from early morning until sundown. It was backbreaking labor and all we got to eat was some soup and a little bread. We were now in the hands of the few Uzbeks who were running the office and managing the workers. They took a liking to my brother Yosel who knew a lot about agriculture. The manager was a very tall, good-looking Tadzik named Nematgon. He was also an exile because he and his family were religious. His father, a mullah, (rabbi) had been arrested, put in jail, and never came out. Nematgon gave my family respect and helped us a lot in his own way, saving us many times from starvation.

The Jewish holidays were approaching, but there was not much to prepare. The main thing was how to explain to the Uzbeks that we couldn't work on the High Holidays. This was not possible due to the lack of communication. Thus, we were chased out to work, even on Yom Kippur. Mom and dad were alone in the house *davening* and crying. We were told "work or jail." My parents didn't ask others to *daven* with them since gatherings, conversations or debates were totally forbidden.

However, time did not stand still. The days were still hot, but we felt autumn in the air. Soon the rainy season would begin bringing rain that lasted weeks without end. We didn't know how to fix the house so that it wouldn't fall apart, and we worried constantly. One day we witnessed a neighbor's house fall down to the ground. Some people even got killed. My sister Rivka and I went to look at the damage. We found a big bag made of animal skin, and in it were dried cantaloupe pits which we took home. Unbelievable as it sounds, those pits saved us from total starvation that winter. Our lips and tongues would bleed from eating the sharply pointed pits, but that didn't stop us because they were all we had. The miracle was that the more we ate from the bag, the more it seemed to contain!

My brother Yosel had a backpack ready since 1940. He was called to the army very often. Every time he said goodbye and left, Mom's heart went with him. Somehow, each time he was actually to be sent to the army, he was released. One day he was called to the office of the collective farm and told that he and my sister Mirl would be going away to work for three months. It was for the army and an order from Stalin, so there was nothing to be done about it. He worried about how to tell Mom, but when she saw him coming home from the office she realized that something was wrong. He told her about having to leave, and needless to say, mom was devastated.

Mirl and Yosel were drafted as soldiers, but they were not in military uniforms. It was more like forced, hard labor under military rules and regulations. They were sent to an undisclosed location, surrounded by a military base, totally forbidden to have any connections with the outside. They were unprepared for something like this. They shared a huge barn with a lot of others, all kinds of nationalities. Men and women were together, under the most horrible conditions. Working ten hours a day, carrying soil and debris on their backs, they dug a tunnel as a storage for military purposes. All they received was a piece of bread and soup, leaving them with empty stomachs most of the time. Not too often, but sometimes, they would offer seconds. That's when the pushings, and stabbings, and killings took place. It looked like Hitler's concentration camp, Stalin's way.

After three months of hell, they were replaced by other people. Their homecoming can't be described. They were walking skeletons. To save mom from collapsing, they kept the experience all to themselves. For them it was the beginning of health problems for the rest of their lives. Yosel faced deadly assignments like this a few times.

When my brother and sister packed and went off only Rivka, mom, dad, and I remained. The winter was very rough. People were dying left and right from typhus, dysentery and starvation. We even had snow which was not usual in Uzbekistan. In the meantime, the Russians were having trouble at the front. Stalin moved his war room to Stalingrad and was commanding the Red Army himself. We had no radio or newspaper and were totally cut off from the world. At the same time, we were still going to work carrying fertilizer on our back collected from animal droppings.

The smell, the hard work and the long hours began to take their toll on me. Weakness and pain took over my body. I soon realized that a big boil was forming in my groin. Mom checked me, and the expression on her face showed her concern.

Afraid to scare me, she began to work on me. I swelled up, ran a temperature and had excruciating pain. In the days ahead I could no longer go to work. There was no medicine at all. Mom kept me in a lying position all the time and applied hot compresses a few times a day. She stayed with me day and night, checking the boil. I cried a lot, and after three weeks Mom finally said to me, "I will perform a small operation." Having no tools, she used her bare hands. I watched her prepare. She boiled pieces of linen and kept them carefully covered and clean. She also washed her hands very carefully. The rest of the family helped. Everyone had a mission. Mom said to me, "It's going to hurt but you will not die." She looked at my groin one more time. I felt her gentle hands touching me lightly – and then came a pull. I screamed and passed out. Dad rinsed my face with cold water and held my head in his hands while Mom squeezed hard to get all the pus out. The next few days Mom worked and stayed with me around the clock. Looking up at her so many things came to my mind. I remembered when I was six years old and while playing in the bakery I fell and split my forehead wide open. I couldn't stop the terrible bleeding. Dad sent someone to bring Mom home from the market. First, she cleaned the blood off my face and then took fresh pumpernickel bread and fresh butter and applied it to the open wound. I know that to some people this sounds unbelievable, but in no time I felt better. I still have a scar on my forehead.

Another time, my brother Yosel, who was very athletic, pulled my arm out its socket while using me in his exercise act. I was in pain, and he was scared. We both ran to Mom who saw us from afar and ran towards us. My brother, frightened, told her what had happened. Mom told him to sit down and keep his hands around my waist very tightly. Then she took the arm, stretched it as far as she could, then let it go at once. After a loud click the bone that was out of place jumped back into its proper socket. There were so many other life-saving episodes. I don't remember them all and many happened before I was born. After all, I am the eighth and last child.

Some other stories do come to mind. One time, as a youngster, I made my Mom laugh so hard, it is still vivid in my memory. It was *Shabbos* or a holiday and we were in *shul*. Mom was praying and very deep in thought. Suddenly, my nose almost dropped to the floor. A huge woman, about seven feet tall and about 400 pounds, walked in. I grabbed my mom's hand and began to shake. Mom asked me what was wrong, and all I could do was point my finger at this woman. Then I said, "Mom, she must be G-d's wife!" Oh well, she found this to be very funny.

Another instance took place in the bakery. A few people came in and they were talking about death. I tried to listen, but I couldn't hear anything. I had a discussion about death with Mom afterwards. She said that everyone has a certain amount of years to live and then dies. When that happens the body is lowered into the ground and then pointing to the sky, she said the soul goes to heaven. I asked her how anyone could do that because the sky was so high. A million questions followed. I, on the other hand, nearly died just trying to understand all of this. It made such an impact on me that I could not sleep and was afraid to be in the house by myself. Mom was sorry that she had told me all this. Then, one day I told Mom, "Alright, if everyone has to die, then I am ready. But, Mom, see to it that I don't die

at night!" Again she burst into such a laugh, but I never witnessed it again for the rest of her life.

Now Mom was living on the edge. She was hoping and waiting for some news. Finally a letter came from brother Yitzhak saying that he was in the army. He had taken a first-aid course and was working very hard, but it was rewarding just to be able to help others. He told her not to worry about him and that he was waiting for news from us. For Mom it was a shot in the arm, but we did not know how much to believe since every letter was censored. However, it was better than nothing.

The spring of 1942 was almost here. A friend of my brother Yosel had found us. He was also in the army, but because of a health problem he was given time off to recuperate. His name was Adek Bialoglowski and he was from Warsaw, Poland. He was all alone so Mom found a place for him with us.

My sister and brother brought home some money as payment for their hard work. The family decided to buy a cow with it so that Mom and dad would have a better chance to survive. We planted a little garden and started to feel encouraged. Then a new order came from Stalin to build a barn for horses. These horses would have to be trained and then shipped off to the army. This news came after a meeting in the office and before we knew it, my brother was selected for this trip along with some other big shots. Somehow my brother had to break the news to mom. She was ready to go with him, but he kept telling her that this was not possible since he was going to be near the Chinese border. Another setback for Mom! She watched her son leave. Where to, no one knew. The good-byes were terrible for her.

In the meantime we began to work on the barns for the horses, carrying bricks on platforms. We were assigned two people per platform and given very little food. We were sick with malaria and had blisters on our hands. It was so devastating, but we went on. The weather got hotter and hotter and the work became very hard, especially for single people – newcomers. One by one they took off, risking their lives. We were a family, so we stayed on. Lack of manpower became a big problem. At times we were taken to other farms to help out. It did not look good all around, and our rations were cut in spite of our suffering from hunger and sickness.

It was midsummer, 1942. By then these so-called "new homes" were ready and we were among those who moved in. Our house was just a little bigger than the other one, but it was nothing more than a bigger box. The important thing was to improve our living conditions. Again we had no tables, beds or chairs. Mom and dad put together a stove from a few stones, but a new battle had begun. We already had four-legged animals to deal with and now we had to look out for snakes, mosquitoes, scorpions and lice. After a while we gave up our humanity. We went, without shame or hesitation, to publicly hunt for lice. It became a way of life since those nasty little creatures left us no choice. The Uzbeks had their own way of dealing with them, but I can't write about it. It makes me sick just to think about it.

How could we protect ourselves from sicknesses like typhus, malaria and dysentery without medication of any kind. This was a big problem for Mom. She was always searching for new ways to keep us healthy. She found out, all by herself, that the branches with which we made a fire to cook left ashes that could be used as

soap. That was a life-saver. Mom began to mix the ashes with water and she boiled our clothing in it day after day. This helped to avoid typhus. Then came the next task. We all got malaria and what a horrible sickness that is to go through. Here is a small idea of what one must go through when stricken with malaria. It starts with chills and bone-breaking pains. Then the body freezes. No amount of applied heat warms you up. After two hours or so, the body begins to burn from the fever. Now nothing can cool you off. After that comes unconsciousness.

Mom worked with her heart and soul to save us. Sometimes she took care of three of us at the same time, covering, uncovering and boiling water. I will never know how she did it. On the days we did not get an attack we had to go out to work. Our rations were already cut so things did not look too good. And, in the meantime, we received no news at all. Mom carried all this pain in her heart. We felt it in our bodies. It was amazing to watch her. She had once been a totally different person, full of life, with a sense of humor, sharing intelligent stories with us that contained important messages which we realized later in life held important lessons for us. I remember that back home, with very little time to spend with her children, she somehow managed to use it wisely. No matter how tired she was she checked on the kinds of books we read and who our friends were.

We had to wear navy blue uniforms with white collars to school; this was mandatory. She made sure that our collars were white and clean. Before going to bed we were given milk or tea to drink, even if we were already asleep. Mom had to read the newspapers, no matter how late the hour, to catch up on the news and the fundraising efforts. Her interest was *Keren Kayemet* (Jewish National Fund) an organization that raised money to buy land in Palestine for Jews.

Mom had a very good and responsible helper in Pearl, her second daughter. She was like another mother to all of us. As I previously mentioned, they were married in 1930s. Pearl and her husband settled in a neighboring town and had two boys. One boy was five and the other was born just before the war broke out. We never saw him because it was too dangerous to travel. We had two sisters in two different directions. We were sure that Pearl would come to Lwow, but lack of information and communication divided us forever. We don't know why they separated; my brother-in-law did escape, but in the end none of them survived. Naturally it cost my mother unbelievable pain.

While in Lwow, my Mom had a plan. She was ready to risk Yosel's life and send him to Hrubieszow, the town in which Pearl lived, to rescue her and her children. But it was not to be; something always went wrong. A friend of my brother Yosel came and watched the preparation. He said to my mother, "I am very surprised at you, Mrs. Unterecht, that you agreed to this very dangerous journey." When she heard this, Mom shook like a leaf and called the whole thing off. But the truth is that Mom was right, there was still time to have saved Pearl. Mom punished herself the rest of her life, blaming herself – but it seemed that all of this happened so long ago. In order to go on, adjustments were constantly being made.

In the meantime, back to reality. We planted a garden with some vegetables. All in all, we thought that we were doing the right thing. We were looking towards a better day, but Stalin's regime had its rules and regulations. Some representatives from the office came to assess the "empire" we built and made us pay for all of the

vegetables. Also, our cow did not produce much milk so we had to go out to buy milk to bring into the office. The garden was neglected. We were too tired and too sick to work all day in the field and at night in the garden to pay up to the office. It was impossible to produce enough for the office alone, and in short time it all fell apart.

Dad built an oven and we began to bake bread. Rivka and I took another risk and sold the bread on the black market so that we could have some bread also. Mom saw us go off to the market hoping and praying that we would return home alive, because we had to deal with crooks and murderers. We were petrified of them, however we had no choice.

In the meantime, Adek was called back to the army. He asked Mom to hold his belongings for him, but mom refused. What if we should never meet again? She suggested to him that he sell everything – he might need he money. And he did. The last thing he gave to Mom was a bottle of cooking oil, begging her to use it. "This is for you, Mrs. Untericht," he said. He was like one of the family and we felt very sad when he departed. Mom gave him a blessing and off he went.

Mom was hoping for some news from anybody. After months of not knowing of Yitzhak's whereabouts, the long awaited letter came telling us that he was out of isolation. His was sentenced to death! No lawyer or witnesses were called since Stalin and his regime didn't believe in human rights. He was charged with criticizing the Russian army and praising the German army. We, who had fled the Germans; it made no sense! He was then taken to a permanent jail 100 kilometers away during a blizzard with freezing weather, handcuffed, on foot and with no rest, food or drink. He survived by eating snow. While in isolation, he could not shave, bathe, or be in contact with anyone; not even with other inmates. Finally, they reached the jail - tired, hungry and frozen. He had grown a long beard and looked more like an animal than a human being. The jail guard refused to accept him claiming that he had been told to expect a *young* man – and this prisoner looked like a 90-year-old man. There must be some mistake. Yitzhak's guard insisted that he was the prisoner. Imagine, after such a horrible journey Yitzhak still had to wait for a decision. After long hours of arguments, they finally put him in a cell, but the other prisoners in it ordered him to stay in one far corner because he was so filthy and smelled so awful.

The letter from Yitzhak, short and to the point, was a nightmare. What Mom had feared had happened. My brother was in jail! She was stricken with grief while the rest of us were at a loss for words. Because his letters were censored we had to be very careful about what we wrote to him. The biggest problem was that we could not go to see him without permission and it was virtually impossible to get a permit because he was a "political" prisoner. Three judges of the highest court in Moscow, the NKGB, had sentenced him to death. Mom was really going through hell.

It was now 1943. Nothing was different except that Mom was getting weaker and weaker. She was so thin and frail. We felt that everything was collapsing under our feet. I could not wait for my brother Yosel to come home. I felt that Mom was losing all hope for survival and panic was setting in.

Then, there is the experience that Yosel had at the Chinese border. This mission was one of the unforgettable ones; in fact I am out of breath just trying to

write about it. Yosel and others had to round up wild horses, a job for which they had no experience. After catching the horses, they had to train them. The job was hard work under horrible conditions. Yosel slept in the barns along with the horses and after taking care of them he had to be back within the time of curfew. That was an order from Stalin! The horses were for the army and doing anything less was construed as going against Stalin's wishes and his regime. Also, the time to complete the job with the horses was limited. To make matters worse, food ran out long before the men returned. Fistfights broke out among the workers and frustration was great. But, to disobey meant punishment and that punishment could be life imprisonment. Yosel's courage and determination was stronger than I can describe. How he managed to survive, I will never know. But, at least Mom knew very little about what he was going through and that kept her alive.

A short time later, Yosel came home. What a relief! He had aged a great deal. We all welcomed him with open arms and with the food and money he brought, we were saved from starvation. However, Yitzhak's news removed any spark of hope for him. The situation in general for us was the same. One could not help seeing the dead bodies that were picked up everyday, thrown on planks attached to mules, and carried away to be buried in a ditch. Nobody escorted them; nobody cried, nobody put markers on their graves. Mom always reminded us that if we saw someone on the street who was obviously starving to death we should give them some food – whatever we had, bread, crumbs, whatever. I was afraid to go near a dying person, but I did it a few times. After offering one some bread, before I turned around another hungry one would bend over and grab the bread away. Moments like these are unforgettable.

Soon we all spoke the language. Yosel was very well liked and trusted in the office. He was given a few acres of land for experiments in growing vegetables. It was a success. We all worked very hard on this and the office chose us, only the girls, to sell the vegetables. We were even given some to keep.

Now the summer was in full swing, and we had newcomers – wounded Russian soldiers. They had come to heal their battered bodies. After a while those who were still capable of fighting returned to the army. Others, who were totally crippled, were sent home. This did not last, however. The heat became hard to tolerate and with the heat came malaria. This time it was unbearable. Unlike the previous year when we had a chance to rest every other day, this time we suffered without any letup. Mom was the only one who did not get malaria. Perhaps it was a miracle. She was working so hard under the terrible stress; again covering and uncovering us and boiling water. One time I was so cold I felt that I was dying. I couldn't stop shaking nor could I keep my teeth from grinding. Mom ran out of clothing to cover all of us so I asked her to crawl on top of me and squeeze me as hard as she could thinking it was probably the last time I would feel her body. I loved it when she did this for me, and after she did, it felt better.

The biggest problem we had was with Dad. He was so very sick with malaria that he swelled up. Mom felt that she was helpless and we decided to take him to the hospital because we were all sick. Because we could not work, all the rights were taken away from us. They took away the bread and other things we were entitled to, even any transportation to take Dad to the hospital. So we put Dad on a board and

carried him there. We took turns watching him. We didn't trust the nurses since they only had a few weeks of training. Nobody cared how many people died. The nurses didn't know what they were doing and when somebody passed away the nurses had a ball. They stole the sheets and pillows off the beds and all the food that had belonged to the patients. This was the only way *they* could survive. We were so happy when Dad finally came home. Once again Mom got very busy helping Dad fully recover.

That same summer many refugees came to Asia from Siberia. These were Polish refugees who had been released from Siberian jails. Their crimes included refusing to become Soviet citizens or daring to criticize the Soviet regime. Some were arrested in Poland for refusing to emigrate willingly to Russia; some just for being late to work. Many times they were arrested for no reasons at all, and once arrested they could not have a lawyer or witness. The bottom line was that Stalin had cut the lungs out of humanity and built his country with prisoners who were his slaves. By now everybody knew that because of the two beasts, Hitler and Stalin, the world would never be the same. We survivors are the eyewitnesses.

Now back to the Polish newcomers. Among them were professionals like doctors and others, who organized a relief center. At times they tried to help with medication or clothing, but it was not without difficulties. In those dark days people changed, no matter who they were. To get some help, one had to stay in line for hours on hot days without water or food. What can you expect to take place? There was shouting, shoving, cursing, fighting - all out of desperation. President Reagan said it best, "Russia, the evil empire."

Only one time Mom took Rivka and me to the relief center to get some medication. We were both unconscious from a malaria attack, and we got *chinina*, a bitter medication. It was all too much for Mom. She tried not to use the clinic, she tried to help us herself. The refugees had been placed in one big room and they depended on the help they got from the center. All of them suffered from health problems: frost bites and crippling from jail sicknesses. The conditions they experienced in jail were unspeakable and for many of them the help that eventually came from the U.S.A., came too late.

Another letter came from Yitzhak. His letters were always welcomed and this particular time was no different. The letter gave us more details. It said that instead of a death sentence, he was given 10 years of hard labor. Of course, Mom was happy that he was still alive, but on the other hand, after 10 years in the Russian "jungles," what chance would he have? Mom already began working on how she could be of help. We knew that he couldn't write the truth and neither could we. So we began to mail him packages, very simple ones. Then we got news that he received one. A postal worker with whom we had become friendly helped us send the packages, something that was normally forbidden. We paid her under the table. Thanks to this help, Yitzhak managed to survive. At times he would throw in a few words of Hebrew in his letters and from these we knew that he was suffering, so we kept sending him those packages as often as we could.

Life went on. One day, out of the blue, a little bird flew into the house. Before we knew it, we had a couple of birds. The songs they sang to each other were amazing to hear; the birds were so much like human . We had almost forgotten

what a normal life was like. Mom was very interested in the birds. She loved them and tried to accommodate them. They built a nest in the ceiling. It was easy for them since the house was built like a *sukkah*, a hut. After a short time they became "parents." Our "beds" were on the floor and as we looked up to the ceiling it was interesting to see the parent birds teaching the little ones how to fly. Mom always prepared water and some crumbs for them.

One evening, when it was already dark, we closed the door. Suddenly the birds became so restless we thought that they were sick. Not Mom! She said, "I think that a baby bird is missing." We opened the door and in flew the baby bird. How did she know this? Birds feed their babies with worms and one night, while I slept, I suddenly woke up screaming. A worm had crawled into my ear! Mom asked what happened and I held my ear, screaming and jumping up and down. Mom asked if I had something in my ear. Hysterically, I answered, "Yes." Not wasting a minute, she ran for water. Taking big sips of it she sprayed it in my ear with force. Then she bent my head on the side, repeated the water treatment a few times, and the worm finally emerged with the water. We were both soaked from perspiration. From then on I put a kerchief on my head when I went to sleep.

On another hot day, while just looking out on the street, we saw a young soldier having difficulties walking. We began walking towards him to offer help. Much to our surprise it was my brother Chaim. We nearly collapsed; we practically carried him into the house. At first, Mom felt numb. He was a mess; so weak that he stuttered, and it was hard to understand what he was saying. But Mom already began to work on him and in a few days he looked better. He told us that he and two other soldiers were given a mission to blow up a bridge. The other two did not survive. He had fallen into a ditch and was covered with mud, so the Germans left him for dead. For days he lay wounded under that bridge until the Russian army pushed the Germans back. When he was found he was sent to a hospital where he spent a year recuperating.

In the hospital he began to look for us. He already knew where we were and he was finally given permission to go for a short time to see his family. The few weeks he was with us went by so fast. By then it had been more than two years that Chaim had been in the army and all that time we had had no news from him. Mom often talked about him during that time, she even dreamed of him.

Then came the goodbyes. That was the hardest thing, especially for Mom. Her heart was broken as she watched him leave. Although he was not being sent to the front anymore, nevertheless he was still a soldier. Some months later he came home again for a short stay. Then he was called back, and this time we were separated for a long time – over 20 years! Mom and Chaim never saw each other again.

Adek had come home. This time he looked really sick. Mom, as always, tried to help him anyway she could. As soon as he felt better, Mom asked him what he was going to do. All he owned was what he had on him. He said he would have to start over again. A few minutes later Mom came in and gave him a bottle of cooking oil, the same one he had given Mom before leaving. Mom said, "Adek, this is for you and for your new beginning." He took one look at it, covered his face with both his hands, and cried for a long time. We were all speechless. Mom said "It's okay. I

managed without it." This was a very touching moment. With Mom's blessing, Adek was doing fine in no time at all. Mom buried the bottle of cooking oil under the ground. It was perfect.

The year was coming to an end. The weather was cooling off. The news from the war zone was encouraging. The Red Army was pushing the Germans out of some big cities like Leningrad, Stalingrad, and other places. These cities suffered horribly. Millions of people lost their lives from starvation and freezing to death. Now we were far away from the front line but we had our own battle to overcome. People here were dying from the same sicknesses and starvation just as we did four years before, with no relief in sight. Once in a while they would bring something to the store. Nobody ever knew what they would bring – clothing, shoes or bread. But as soon as the truck showed up, everyone ran to grab a spot in line.

One day they brought galoshes. I was determined to get a pair. It didn't matter if they were men's or ladies,' small or large. There was no selection. That was easy to say, but to get them was something else. I was in line when the pushing began and dizzy from being shoved around in all directions, especially away from the store. I was practically clothes-free. My hair looked like that of Bozo the Clown, my bones were crushed, and I felt like I had been run over by a truck. But, no galoshes! I was mad as hell. The Russian punks had gotten them. When I got home, Mom looked at me and a little smile appeared on her face. She said, "To hell with it! Thank God, you are in one piece."

Continuing with the story of Yitzhak, after finishing a big job on one side of Siberia, he and the other prisoners were transferred to the other side. The journey was deadly. They were packed to capacity in the cattle cars, in 40 below zero weather, without food or water. All in all there were 2000 prisoners. By the time they reached their destination only 300 survived. Among them was Yitzhak, thank G-d! Miraculously he received our package of raisins and raw rice. By then Yitzhak had been in jail for four years and Mom had had no peace, thinking of him constantly.

Before we knew it spring would be here. In the meantime, we were working long hours, carrying fertilizer on our backs no matter how bad the weather was. Brother Yosel was becoming more popular at his work and speaking the language better helped us all a lot.

It was now 1944. For a while it seemed as though nothing unusual was happening but the quiet did not last for too long. Yosel had just found out that there was another trip in the works, and he was to be given a new mission. From now on he was responsible for distributing all kinds of merchandise which would be given out to the farmers. He was assigned to 60 farmers. The merchandise had to be brought from the biggest warehouse in Tashkent. A plan had to be worked out because according to the law any little mistake could be disastrous.

And so the work began. We needed a few trucks and the farm did not have them since they had been taken away to the army. So the farm worked out a plan that a small truck and a cow would be given to us and we would sell the merchandise on the market. With the money we could rent two big trucks. Yosel explained all this to Mom. Needless to say, she felt miserable. Mom gave me one look and I said I would go with him. She was not thrilled with the idea, but relieved.

The mission we undertook turned into a nightmare. It was January, the weather was cold and we didn't have too many warm clothes. The trip was supposed to take two days in all, with the trip from the farm to Tashkent in three hours. But what happened, in typical Russian style, was that it took around 15 hours. On the small truck were a cow, a little calf, the four of us, plus two passengers who jumped on board. It was very crowded! To add to the problem was that it was very windy and the cow did what the cow must do when nature calls. We were all splashed with the smelly stuff. We had to stop a few times because the truck broke down and each time it took longer to fix it. According to Russian habits, Yosel had to kick the tires and use a few dirty words to get the truck to move. Funny, but true!

Around 5 a.m., while everyone was asleep, I awoke suddenly and saw that not far away a locomotive car was coming towards us at full speed. We were approaching a railroad and had to cross over to the other side. I panicked so completely that I lost my voice and couldn't scream. This turned out to be a miracle. If I would have screamed the driver would have slowed down and the locomotive would have smashed us to pieces. There were no stop signs or guards and he would have been right on top of us. The locomotive could only slow down a little, and we felt a strong jolt and were thrown from side to side. Everyone woke up and the men began to fight with one another. Everyone blamed the driver. I held my brother's hand and asked him to stay away from the fight. Finally, the driver admitted that he had fallen asleep.

We reached Tashkent in the morning. We stopped for a drink and a bit of food and off to the market we went to sell the mamma and her baby cow. We didn't know how this was done so first we watched the other sellers. The bargaining went on for hours, and was I ever glad when it was over. By then I was pooped. Then we went to the truck rentals and began to negotiate the whole deal. By that time, the day was gone, and we were told to return the next day. I fell asleep while Yosel tried to work out a plan. When I awoke, Yosel said to me "We have a problem. We don't have enough money to pay for the trucks." For hours he and his boss tried to come up with a legal plan. Finally, his boss said, "There is only one thing to do. Charge the farmers ten cents per yard of materials that is used for clothing, and not for the other things, and that should do it. I think this is allowed and should not be a problem."

They put it all in writing, signed it, and that was that! The next day we got up early, had some tea with pita bread and raisins, and we were on our way to the warehouse. The loading took forever and we were in line for a whole day. Soon our truck, and a few others, were turned away because it was too late. We were asked to come back the following day. The next day, the same thing happened. Finally, our turn came. By the time we loaded the trucks the weather had changed, it was late in the afternoon and it had become cold. We had to stay and make sure that nothing was stolen since we were responsible for everything.

In the middle of the loading they wanted to stop and continue the next day, so an argument broke out. The boss was screaming, "We have been here for two days!" Soon something was worked out and the loading continued. My truck was finished first. Yosel then told the driver where to take me and I was to wait there for

him. It was only supposed to take one hour more for my brother to have his truck loaded.

I couldn't wait to be reunited with my brother, have something to eat, warm up and get some sleep. But instead, as the saying goes, "out of the frying pan and into the fire." As soon as we began to move away from the warehouse, a slow snow began to fall. I felt that I made a mistake by not waiting for my brother and it might cost me my life. From this warehouse to my brother's place was only 30 minutes. Instead, the driver kept going and going for two hours. Finally he stopped and said "I'm going to see a friend of mine. It won't take too long."

The snow thickened. I was so cold, petrified and tired, I didn't know where I was. It must have been midnight. The driver came out and said, "We'll go to your brother's place a little later." Then he took out a few cotton balls, soaked them in oil, put one on fire and said "This will keep you warm for a while. I'm in the middle of eating. As soon as I finish I will take you there. You know, I haven't seen this friend for a long time."

He left me without even a drink of water and I was never so frightened in my life. As soon as the flame shot up in the air from the cotton ball, dogs that looked like skeletons came running in my direction. A few horrible looking visitors looked me over. My heart beat slowed down and I was sure that this was the end. I cried the entire night and kept eating snow to keep from falling asleep. After the dogs and the visitors left, I felt some relief. I kept thinking "If I am attacked, how will I protect myself? If the truck will be taken from me, it would be called negligence and for this I would spend the rest of my life in jail."

My mind went blank and the snow kept coming down. I know that Uzbeks carry knives and after a meal they smoke pot – hashish. I remember the days in the cotton field and how they got out of hand and downright dangerous after smoking. By then I was totally exhausted. The snow finally stopped falling and a new day had begun. The driver came out. I was shivering and speechless. He did not apologize nor ask me if I wanted a drink. All he said was, "I had too much to drink and fell asleep." I didn't answer him. On the way to my brother's place I kept thinking that I was nearly at the end of my life. How did I live through this and how can I ever explain this to anyone?"

Finally we were reunited. Yosel gave one look at me and his eyes filled with tears. I know he was thinking of Mom and what she would say if she saw this. As it was, he already felt guilty. He brought me hot tea and I began to warm up. Most important to him was that I was not physically harmed. When I told him that I wasn't, he was relieved beyond words. Years later, when I remembered this incident, I couldn't get over it; I couldn't get rid of the nightmares.

On the way home, my brother could not take his eyes off me; he felt so sorry for me. But I chose not to talk. I felt so sick and kept suppressing the tears. I could not wait to be home and to see Mom again. All I asked of G-d was to give me strength to make the trip. Coming into the house was as hard as the trip itself. I walked in and heard "Oh!" I tried to hide my face but Mom was holding both her hands together and Dad was behind her as they walked towards me. She asked, "Are you alright?" I answered, "Mom, I'm so tired I just want to go to bed," and did. But, as tired as I was I could not fall asleep, probably the anger kept me awake.

Mom watched over me, touching my head a few times to check if I had a fever because I could not stop shaking. Finally, I fell asleep.

For the next few weeks I followed Mom everywhere. She held back her questions but I knew she would eventually ask me what happened. Soon we started to talk. The main thing she wanted to know about was if I had been raped. As I told them the story, Mom and Dad were in tears. They felt guilty. I said the trip had been too much for me and I could see that Mom was up to something. She had had enough of farm life and would try to get us out of here.

In no time we found another disgusting place, and in one night we packed and moved. The little town we moved to gave us a lift. We met new European people and made some friends, however life was still far from normal. This was still Russia and everything was forbidden. We had to take new risks in order to survive. Rifka, petrified to go to the market, found a job as a secretary in the only court in town. Mirl and I went to the market to sell or buy whatever came along. Doing this was not without risks. I had been arrested a few times, but managed to escape. I had been to Tashkent a few times to buy some merchandise and what I saw there scared me to death. Many passengers on the train who went out on the platform for a smoke, returned with slashed throats. Others were robbed in front of everybody. The killing and stealing went on and on and I could not take it.

We then tried to buy wheat and sell flour. For Mirl it was a very bad time. We had to carry 40 to 50 kilos of wheat on our shoulders quite a long distance to the mill. We had to wait there overnight in order to be the first in the morning and were petrified of the Uzbeks. There were no women among them, only men drunk from smoking pot. One time all of us went to buy a big sack of wheat and carried it home first. Each of us had 50 kilos in our bags. We walked on the railroad, it was safer. A policeman came along and so we tried to walk faster. When my sister Rivka fell and could not get up, we went to her rescue and sat down on the sacks. The policeman then asked us what we were doing there and we told him that we had missed the train. Then we worried how we would get the sacks of wheat on our backs since we had torn the ligaments in our hands. Finally, when we did get home, each of us rolled on the floor in order to relieve the pain in our broken bones.

We began to sell the flour to the natives, but we couldn't get enough flour to sell. This was done from the house, with people walking in and out. The police station was across the street and Mom would look out the window and give us signals when it was safe to let the customers leave. She was so afraid that the police would catch us. After a while we gave this up, it simply was too dangerous. Mom always reminded us not to overcharge the women who bought the flour and made pita bread to sell in the market. Many of them had lots of kids at home and since their men were in the army they also struggled.

Since we were living in a box, the few things we had were hung on the walls. One morning Dad was preparing to *daven* the morning prayers. He took his jacket off the wall and put his arm up a sleeve. Suddenly he screamed with pain and we all ran to him. Mom pulled his jacket off and out came a scorpion. We all panicked, but not Mom. She told us to look for string, anything, to tie Dad's arm in order to stop the bleeding and the poison from spreading. Dad was in agony. His arm had already turned black. Mom found the place where he was bitten, washed her hands and

started to tear the skin a little so she could squeeze out the poison. However, she was too weak to do it so we took turns. I prayed to G-d that Dad would not have a heart attack, and although he was weak for a few weeks, he slowly recovered.

The time passed. My sister Mirl had been seeing a young man for a while. He was one of the refugees from Siberia and lived in a house for the crippled and handicapped. His name was Moishe Weg, and he was also from Poland, from the town of Zeszow, near Krakow. He was sent to a Siberian jail because he refused to accept a Russian passport. Chosen by the jail officer to report to him about any complaints or political discussions by the other inmates, he of course, refused to cooperate, stating that he was not a spy. For this refusal, he was tortured, beaten, starved, threatened, and wounded by the police who cut his cheek. He was then sent to a hospital.

After a short engagement, we began the wedding preparations. It was quite an ordeal. Mom complained that she had a lot of pain in her hand and every day it grew worse. The palm of one hand would swell up and she could not eat or sleep. She was in a lot of pain and we were all scared to death. A big boil began to form and it looked like the one I had had in the groin, so only I knew what Mom was going through. I went to the market less often and Mirl had to prepare her own wedding. It became a hectic time. Yosel had his job to deal with, Rivka had to go to work, and Mom could not help. She was so aggravated, and everything was left to Mirl and me. Naturally, there was no shortage of tears.

Somehow we found a nice piece of white material with a background of flowers. A lady refugee made the dress. The cookies were made from flour and white beets baked on top of the stove and Dad was busy preparing a *ketubah,* a marriage certificate. All our *ketubot* were written by Dad. The outside *chuppah* (wedding canopy) was made with four long sticks that Yosel had brought from somewhere, and Dad covered the sticks with a *tallit* (prayer shawl). He also made wine from raisins. It was more like a drink and we loved that wine. Even back home Dad had made this wine for Passover. So at the wedding we had wine, cookies, raisins and a lot of pita bread and tea. We had no music, but Dad gave *chuppah kedusha,* blessings. There was no dancing, there were no invitations, and no close family. There was nobody from my new brother-in-law's family and it was so sad to see him standing alone. And, of course, we had no problems with fashion and clothing since we had none! Nevertheless, we were very happy for my sister.

The wedding was like an "open house" because Mom insisted that we invite the whole house of the crippled and handicapped. Some came by themselves, others needed assistance. We helped them all. The wedding began with a few songs and after the *chuppah* we put the food on the tables. The guests attacked it like a bunch of hungry animals let out of their cages. If that wasn't enough, the sick ones could not suppress their emotions and began to cry hysterically. Thus the wedding turned into a funeral. We all knew what they were crying about – memories of home, parents, families and most of all, the nagging question - when the war ends will there be a home? Will they find their families? It was hard for all of us, especially for the single people. When it was all over, Mom was crying. It hit her too, thinking of her family and the grandchildren. After the wedding, Mirl went to her own place.

The rest of us felt funny; we could not find anything to talk about. Quietly and exhaustedly we went to sleep.

The next few weeks were pure torture for Mom. The pain was intolerable and Dad was with her constantly. I went out to the market for very brief sales, we still needed something to live on. I managed to be near her and cooked for both my parents with whatever I could put together. And when the boil on her hand began to look "ripe," I prepared the same treatment that Mom had administered to me. I begged Yosel to do it; I could not see her suffer any longer. So my Dad and Yosel helped. My heart nearly stopped as I watched her because she was so pale and had no strength. When Mom wanted a drink of water I had to hold her head up, she was so weak. Mirl came a few times to give us a hand and Rivka came from work. It took a long time for Mom just to get out of bed, but we were so happy that she was still with us.

For weeks we watched over Mom. We talked about daily events and what happened to me at the market. Rivka witnessed so many heartbreaking situations, most of them really pathetic. Here's one story. An 80-year-old Korean man, who picked up about two kilos of wheat kernels off the field, was caught and arrested. He was sent to jail for a long time. Nobody checked up on him and he died there. One day his papers came in for prosecution. When his name was called, a policemen stood up and announced that the man was dead. The judge, whose name was Kim, said to my sister Rivka: "Never mind, I'm giving him a two-year jail sentence." Oh well, that's Russia for you!

Now that the war was going better for the Russians, Stalin became "Mr. Clean." He was looking for the citizens of his country who escaped army duties; law breakers. Arrests were made daily. People simply disappeared. It put a strain on all of the refugees. One day Rivka came home from work and announced, "Tomorrow they will arrest Mr. and Mrs. Izbytcke. The papers are in the office." Mom said, "Since we know about it, we have to do something." At midnight Mom and Dad went to these people, woke them up and told them to pack and leave at once.

Two things come to mind as I remember this incident. First of all Mom could hardly walk. Secondly, she took such a risk. In a situation such as this if she was caught G-d knows what would have happened to all of us. But nothing could stop my mother if it meant saving a life. We never knew how many lives Mom saved. Years after the war people would recognize us, grab us by the hands, and thank us. They all said one thing, "If not for your Mom, I would never have survived." Some of these people I never knew.

Anyway, the next day the police came looking for Mr. and Mrs. Izbytcke. They were not found since they did what Mom had told them to do. However, the three children they left behind were dragged to the police and questioned. The house was searched and everything was taken away. The kids suffered for a few months, then they were reunited with their parents.

By this time the war was five years old. It had already been too long for all of us. Rumors began to spread that the second front was fighting the Nazis and things were going better. Now, more than ever, it paid to fight for survival. A letter had come from Yitzhak who wrote that for good work and good behavior they had given

him 100 grams of tobacco and a five-month reduction of his ten-year sentence. All this did not matter, what did was to know that he was alive.

After years of waiting for some hopeful news such as that the war was coming to an end, the next bit of news hit our home like an unexpected tornado. Without a warning, Yosel was arrested and put in jail, supposedly just for investigation. His crime? – the ten cents they charged the farmers to pay for transportation. Mom simply fell apart. We all knew what it meant. We were lost without Yosel. All the hopes and the waiting to see the end of the war went down the drain – it was so near yet so far from everything.

Some refugees were already planning to buy their way out of Russia, but Mom never considered this to be the best option. In any case, we couldn't think of anything else but how we were going to handle this new misery. Russia did not believe in human rights or witnesses or tears. We didn't know any so-called "experts" or "lawyers." We began to travel to Tashkent to look for copies from the trucking company, but they dragged their feet and were not interested in helping us. On the other hand, the KGB was interested in cashing in on our problem. Before long, we received a note that only the KGB would help – for a hefty 20,000 rubles. We knew about these tricks and turned down their offer by explaining that we didn't have this kind of money and besides which, our brother was innocent.

Yosel's boss was also arrested. To break his spirits, the prosecutor told Yosel that his boss had already confessed. To the boss, they said that my brother Yosel confessed. That's the way the Bolsheviks work. The torture did not stop. I visited the jail every day – of course, from the outside. They would not allow me to talk to Yosel so we developed hand signals and this was the way we communicated. One time a policeman saw me giving signals, so he threw the long, heavy jail keys at me. It missed my face by a hair! The nightly interrogations, repeated over and over again, took its toll on my brother. Every night, from midnight until the wee hours, they cursed and threatened him that if he did not tell the truth he would never see his family again. They threw heavy objects at him. He was filthy and had no sleep.

One night Mom woke up shaking and upset. She then woke all of us up and said that she had seen Yosel walking in the street and that he was so weak, he had fallen. She insisted that we go to the police station. We tried to talk her out of that saying it was just a dream. She answered that if no one would go with her, she would go alone, so we took her at 5 a.m., holding her under the arms. Just as we approached the police station, two police officers were pushing my brother out of the doors. He looked terrible and Mom began to cry. He looked drugged; had difficulties walking; had a beard, and was filthy and totally exhausted. When the police saw us, they stopped us from getting closer. We were told that if we came closer, they would shoot. I kept screaming out loud that we had good news for him and begged him to remain firm. He shook his head.

Going home, we felt as though we had just come from a funeral. This was the second dream that was like reality. In the first dream, Mom saw Chaim lying wounded with bloody bandages on his forehead. Years later, Chaim related that at the time Mom had the dream he was indeed wounded, with bloody bandages on his head. Whether you believe it or not, when Mom or Dad talked about a dream, we listened. I remember before the war, Dad woke us up one night and said he dreamed

that the big *shul* (synagogue) near us was on fire. A short time later, a huge fire broke out and not only did the *shul* go up in smoke, but our house as well. The whole quarter of that neighborhood vanished.

Another time, when we were already in the Ukraine, Dad had a dream that his father, who had been dead for many years, said to him, "Don't worry, you will be living in America." That was in 1940. Out of respect, we didn't make fun of him, but between us we couldn't stop laughing.

Oh yes, my Dad did live in the United States for 16 years!

We kept trying so hard to free Yosel. At times we all lost hope, but we did not give up. Suddenly we heard that Yosel's boss was out of jail, blaming everything on my brother. We explained in a letter that as new citizens in the Soviet Union we were unfamiliar with the laws. Besides, the money did not go into anyone's pocket. If there was leftover money, it was in the office, at the collective farm over which my brother had no control.

After a few months of unbelievable frustration, Yosel was finally freed from jail. Our reunion with him cannot be described. It took Mom's breath away. How she survived with such a weak heart and worn-out body was another miracle. As for Yosel, we did not let him go out of the house.

It was already 1945. A few months later, the war came to an end. People were jubilant and there was great joy and happiness. There were even rumors that soon we would be given permission to exchange our Russian passports for new Polish passports. Everything was so promising, but we had learned not to be carried away. After all, we were still in Russia and Stalin was still alive. We decided to move to Tashkent because, if the news was true, the Russians would organize the transports from Tashkent that would take us back to Poland. We began to pack, when a letter came from Yitzhak saying that he was now accused of trying to escape. He was re-sentenced, and the five years he had already served would not count.

PART TWO

Yitzhak would have to serve an additional ten years of hard labor. I thought my mother would collapse. A deadly silence took over the house. None of us cried, our hearts had turned to stone. What we later found out was that Yitzhak's wife had been trying to see him. Every time she asked for permission, she was turned down. After all, he was a political prisoner. After waiting a few years she finally got the permission, and she went to see him. It took two days of travel each way to get to the prison. After they exchanged a few words, two guardsmen came and took Yitzhak away. Had they gone too far away from the allowed meeting zone? I don't know. The guards said to Yitzhak's wife, "You can go home now – the visit is over." Yitzhak had been accused of trying to escape, that's why they gave him another ten years' imprisonment, all over again. He found out years later that he was the father of a little boy whom he had never seen. His son lived only eight months, dying of starvation. His wife survived the war, but Yitzhak and she never got together again. They had been living such different lives for so many years. She was my first cousin.

The rest of our family began packing with heavy hearts and mixed feelings. We moved to Tashkent and found a room in an Uzbeck's house and tried to plan

ahead. As soon as we moved in the family Izbickis who were living there before us found out and came to visit us. They would come to see us often and helped us a lot. You see, we had actually saved their lives. On one of their visits my brother Yosel had learned how to operate a knitting machine for ladies' stockings. The family Izbickis began again to sell these stockings and other kinds of merchandise on the black market. Yosel worked in the house making these silk stockings. However, he was new at it and not up to speed, so we all helped out.

The Izbickis introduced us to a very interesting man, one who will always be considered a *tzadik* (a righteous man). The man had a special mission. Originally he had come from Poland and was a big businessman before the war. He had received permission from the Russian government to operate a small factory. He paid taxes and it was legitimate. Back home in Poland and Paris he had been in the hosiery business, but when the war broke out, the Russians in Poland had caught him, arrested him, and shipped him off to Siberia. Now he lived in Asia, in Tashkent.

He would walk the streets, pick up young girls and boys, and bring them home. Most were already on their last leg and had lost their entire families, including their parents. They had no food and were dying of hunger. At his home he taught them how to operate a knitting machine, taught them about their Jewish religion, and nourished them back to physical health. He then matched them up with marriage partners and as soon as they could live on their own, they moved on. Then he would take in others.

My Mom admired and praised him. Sister Mirl and I purchased merchandise from him and then we sold the stockings to customers on the black market. In order to obtain merchandise, I would get up at 5 a.m., and wait outside. This is how I came to see him *daven* (pray) with two pair of *tefillin*. His name was Shemtoff, and what happened to his family, nobody knows. He probably had a very large family and lost them during the war in Europe, but he could never talk about it.

One morning, I took my Dad with me to purchase merchandise and introduced him to Mr. Shemtoff. They became friends. Dad then had a place to go to and they *davened* together. In a short time Dad became a different person. But Mom, as always, had a million things on her mind and for her everything always seemed difficult. We worried about her health since she had become very weak. One day, all three daughter took Mom to do some shopping. She was looking to buy some food and didn't know what a dangerous place the market could be. One could be killed or robbed at any time. In no time, she was surrounded by a bunch of crooks that already had their hands in Mom's pocket. All three of us lost no time, and without thinking, we jumped on those thugs, fighting them off. They recognized me from the market and I ended up having to pay off the crooks from every black market sale that I made. It was this experience that made my Mom realize what we had to deal with.

We also made some friends with the Buchara Jews. They spoke Hebrew and Russian and when the holiday of Passover came along, thanks to them the preparation was a little easier. They were a big help. They knew where to purchase whatever was needed for Passover and how to prepare everything.

Each day there were new rumors about getting official registration and we thought we might be able to leave. Every survivor had only one question in mind – are we almost free? There were no newspapers, no announcement or other means of notification and facts – only rumors. We were kept in the dark, waiting to hear whether we could leave or not. Home for us was Zamosc, Poland, but, by now, this part of Poland was part of the Russian occupation. This was very unpleasant.

The enthusiasm amongst the survivors ran high. My Mom let it be known that she was not going to go home to Zamosc, Poland, with us and leave Yitzhak alone in jail. We felt as though the house had just collapsed. How could we leave without Mom? First we talked to Mom very gently, but nothing helped. Soon, however, we found a way to prove to her that we already had been separated enough. At that time, the Polish government was in exile, in Moscow. The President was a woman named Wanda Wasilewska. We wrote to her and pleaded for help. She actually wrote back to us, stating that my brother was not the only Polish prisoner in the Soviet Union. In fact, there were 68,000 prisoners of Polish origin in jail. She said that an amnesty was in the works and it was only a matter of time until they would all be free. It was hard to ignore this good news, but also difficult to believe it was true. It did, however, give us something to work with when talking to Mom about taking the train back home.

It was 1946. By this time many families had bought their way out of Russia in spite of the cost and danger. Mom was absolutely against it because of Yitzhak. She could not stop thinking of him. Finally our names came up and we were called for registration. At that time my Mom was sick and my sister Mirl was expecting a baby. We postponed the whole thing, and slowed down. I guess the truth about going home was scary. What would we find there? The rumors were horrible and it was also a long trip. All this was too much for Mom. We were all under such stress. Yosel stopped making stockings and I went to the black market less and less. Most of the time I sold my sister's merchandize. She was already in the late months of pregnancy. The weather was very hot and it became too much for her.

In the meantime, we watched people leaving for home. It was very depressing. Slowly we prepared for the long journey. It was a time of mixed emotions. We all readied ourselves for painful times and worried how Mom would take all this. First, would she be able to make the two-month trip? She was so thin, so pale and weak, and had a broken heart as well. We prayed often. Sister Mirl gave birth to a baby boy and the Buchara Jews came and arranged the *brit mila* (circumcision)– they arrange for a *mohel* (circumciser) and some food! They were a tremendous help. Thank G-d for them.

The *simcha* for Sheliay or Sidney took away some of Mom's misery. This was the only grandson that she saw being born after the war. All the other six grandsons that were left at home before the war did not survive. Sheliay was almost one month old when we were notified to get ready for the long journey home. I can't describe it. Mom watched the way we packed the few things we had while pacing the floor back and forth. We all knew that she still didn't want to go, but we were packed and ready very quickly. At the railroad station we met a huge group of people that we did not know. Those that we did, had already left before us.

It was now June, one year after the war had ended. Mom was our main concern. What would we do if she got sick in the middle of nowhere. We had every reason to be concerned. We were then packed into trains that were really cattle cars, and we felt like sardines. The cars had large shelves which became places to sleep. We selected the corner that was near a window. Our family squashed together and we tried to make a space for Mirl and her family away from the crowd. Even so, when the train would stop short, baby Sheliay would get hit with flying packages. The baby had a *pidyan ha-ben* on the train because we felt it would have been my father's wishes.

The trip itself was inhumane. We were totally on our own. It seemed like we were going to the gas chambers instead of to freedom. We had to share this horrible journey with a bunch of indescribable characters that had forgotten about respect, decency and honesty. They were disrespectful and had no shame. When my father prayed, they made fun of him. The trip took two months, and they were the worst part of it. Mom didn't know why we couldn't handle them better – that we should just forgive these lost souls who had no family remaining. Mom prayed to G-d for those survivors. She had a lot of pity for them. What if they didn't find their families, she would ask? "G-d is with them." That was my Mom, she would always find the right thing to say.

The journey was the worst ever. Of course, there was always a problem finding food in Russia even if you were not on a train. Mirl suffered a lot as the baby did not have enough milk. Mom suffered and felt guilty leaving Russia while my brother was still in jail. The train kept going for hundreds of miles without a stop. There was really nothing to stop for – no towns, no villages. There weren't even any railroad stations. The only thing we knew was that it was still Russia. It looked like no-man's land. There was nothing out there. When we came to a station, the train stopped and people jumped off, one on top of another, hoping that they would be the lucky ones to find some food. For us, bread or hot or cold water meant survival. There was so much pushing, screaming and cursing – everyone wanted to be the first one out. We were rarely successful at finding food and water.

Getting off the train, for us, meant an opportunity to answer nature's call. For my parents, especially for my Mom, this was a miserable experience. Because of her poor health just jumping in and out of the train was torture, although for the rest of us, it meant nothing. Seeing the naked buttocks of men and women didn't matter any more – we were used to it. We all looked like animals anyway. These thoughts kept repeating themselves over and over again. It became a new way of living. A few times when the cattle car was half empty after people had gotten off to look for food, some Russians actually jumped into the car and stretched out to steal a ride from one destination to another. We certainly didn't need them, but there was nothing we could say or do. We had to be polite. Their bodies were covered with lice and they would pick them off and throw them at us. In addition, they constantly burped loudly and passed gas like animals. It was enough to make us go insane.

I wondered if there was more than one Hell. The more days that passed, the more Hells we had to meet. It seemed like this was Stalin's version of the Final Solution. This particular train trip seemed like the pathway toward Hell, not away from Hell. To get some rest, we took turns lying down. There was not enough room,

so about one half of us at a time would be able to lie down. Those of us who were sitting had to watch those who helped themselves to our things. We also took turns covering each other with whatever we had, perhaps with a little sweater. We also had our hands full with Mom. She didn't feel good. My sister's baby was very cranky. We were running out of water. In other words, we were starting to panic.

I watched Mom while she was lying down in this uncomfortable place, trying to suppress the pain. There was a terrible noise coming from the railroad tracks and her thin body was constantly shaking. I thought to myself how nice it would be to have a hot cup of tea for her, it could be a lifesaver. But, that was only a wish. I kept my eyes glued on Mom, but I couldn't help her. Looking out the window I saw that the train was running through unknown places, but we all knew this was still Russia. The truth was we really didn't know exactly where we were. Petrified all the time, we could not chase all the bad thoughts away. What would we do if Mom really needs medical attention or if there is an emergency? We didn't have anything with us. Even if there were a doctor or a nurse aboard the train, how would we be able to get to them or them to us? That trip was a petrifying experience.

`A while later, it seemed to feel as though the train was slowing down. We guessed that there was something out there that was worth slowing down for. Everyone inside the train was preparing themselves for action. We were no different. Of course, the minute the doors opened, people acted just like the animals in a Spanish bullfight. "Everyone – off to the races!" Our "racers" were my brother and brother-in-law. The rest of us took care of other needs like washing a few baby diapers and our own nature calls. If the men did not bring anything back except hot or cold water, that was enough. Nothing mattered anyway. We had no idea what day of the week it was or the date.

Even Dad stopped asking whether it was *Shabbas* yet. He was always very deep in his thoughts. His lips were constantly moving and I assumed he was praying most of the time. He didn't need a *Siddur* or prayer book – he knew most of it by heart. We lost touch with the outside world a long time ago and it was hard to believe that we had lived away from civilization for a total of six years. It was scary. The train started to make more and more stops and the routine became familiar. Coming closer to the Ukraine, the curiosity ran high, but we were not really anxious to stop there. We had lived nearby in the Ukraine from 1939 to 1941. Our main worry was Mom. What would happen once we told her the bitter truth about her family vanishing years ago in the Ukraine. This would devastate her; frighten her.

Mom became very restless as we got closer to the Polish border. She said if the train would stop in the town of Lvow, she would get off and visit our cousins, the Handelsman family. None of us liked that idea, but we knew she would go. So when we reached Lvow, Mom, at the end of her strength, left the train holding on to my brother Yosel's arms, and both went to the address, Janowska 52. When they rang the bell, the janitor's wife came to the door and recognized Mom right away. She began to cry and crossed herself a few times. Mom said, "All I want to know is what happened to the Handelsman family." The sobbing woman answered, saying that "the big German trucks came and took them away in the year 1942 and I never heard from them again. That's all I know." That was the beginning of the truth. What went on in her heart, we could only imagine. She began to react and we could

see that she was thinking about how she could face the horrible truth. One thing she did let us know, "Nobody should go to the town of Zamosc. That's out!" This was the town in which we were born and none of us saw it again. We wondered what had happened to the new home that my father had built. Who lives there now?

Mom returned, and we were ordered to get back on the train, and the trip continued. Suddenly, it came to a stop, but instead of letting us out as usual, we were told to keep the doors locked and stay in. We were also told to find stones and sticks because we might need to protect ourselves. The Poles were going crazy. They didn't approve of us coming back to Poland. In fact, right at that moment there was a pogrom in the town of Kielc so we had to stay put until further notice.

All the way from Russia we had a young man who traveled with us. He was known as the "Bugle Boy" because he always played on his bugle. He used his music as a signal that the train was about to move so that everyone would run back. However, he didn't listen to the warnings and went off the train to the city. In the morning he was found dead with a slashed throat. That was our welcome home! The curfew was finally called off.

We came to a town called Leginica. Here we were told to get off; this was where we would stop. To our surprise we saw young Israeli Haganah boys helping to get the families together. They placed us in apartments where previously the Germans were stationed. Sister Mirl and her family were given a small room, not far from us and we got a larger room. In the town we saw a Russian battalion with many Russian soldiers and the first thing we did was to look for a Russian doctor. We found one. He came, checked Mom, and gave her some pain killers and other medication and told us that she needs a lot of rest, that she was extremely weak and malnourished. Even though we had some food, Mom didn't eat very much.

After taking care of her, we all took showers and changed the clothing that we had been wearing for weeks. We were also told to come to a very important meeting, and we did. We were gathered in a large room. It was the headquarters for the refugees. As soon as we walked in my heart nearly stopped – there we found a list of names of those who were killed after the war after going back to Poland. Among them were listed some of our friends. The war had already been over for a year. Among the names was Wygoda, They had been candy makers. They had left Russia on their own a year before us. The father, mother and sister were killed on one of the two trucks that they had hired. When the shooting began, the rest of the family that was on the other truck jumped off and ran into the woods. All this had happened on the Polish/Czech border.

We were asked not to travel any place by ourselves and to say home and keep the doors locked. We lived under command. The Haganah boys brought us news and information for traveling. They laid out new plans for us to reach Germany where there wee displaced persons' camps since no other country was allowing people in. The DP camp was supported by the United States government and we wanted to go there. They told us they would inform us when the time would be right. The borders were supposed to be open, but they were not and we were told that getting out of Poland was a must. However, it would not be possible to keep our families together, but we would be smuggled out and tickets would be paid for us by Jewish organizations.

The arrangements were that singles would travel first, then families with children and then the elderly. We didn't like this plan, but there was no other way. Organizations were sprouting out of nowhere to help people and we joined the Mizrachi. Other organizations did not appeal to Mom because they were not religious ones. After a few weeks, Yosel, Rifka and I left Poland. The rest of the family stayed behind. Mom gave us some money and a gold watch that had belonged to sister Pearl. She asked me to try to save it. "Give it away only if it will save your lives." Oh, how I guarded this watch. Through all those years, and all those miles of traveling under horrible conditions, I saved the watch. It is still in my safe deposit box today. My only regret is that I could not give the watch back to my sister Pearl. She did not survive.

The journey was a disappointment. It was very disorganized. Masses of people traveled together at the same time. Crossing the Polish-Czech border we were separated and men and women were stripped naked, searched, humiliated and robbed. So, it seemed, the war really was not over. We were Jews! I had 2000 German marks in money and the gold watch and I almost had a heart attack when they searched me. But they did not find anything. I had hidden 1000 marks and the watch on the bottom of my shoes. I was dressed in pants and loafers and when ordered to undress, I took the chance and remained only in the shoes and the pants. I don't know why they didn't hit me then. I kept pushing down the pants' legs to cover the shoes and with the material of the pants it worked. Otherwise, I was totally naked. I did not look the inspector in the face. To this day I don't know if she was Polish or Czech..

Yosel and I were already on the Czech side, but sister Rifka was on the other. She was upset and crying, so I said to her, "Don't worry. If you're not permitted to go with us we will go back to Poland." The truth was I didn't know how we could get back to Poland on our own. All the other people who were not on the list were let go and among them were my sister Rifka. After giving me permission to get dressed, I began to shiver. I quickly put on my clothes and joined my brother on the other side. All that they took away from me were my brother's cigarettes, but the rest, I saved; all this time I was walking on the money and the watch. It was too dangerous to stop and free myself of these things and the blisters and pain were devastating. With tears that never stopped, I marched to the station that was about 10 kilometers away. When I finally took my shoes off, my feet were covered with water bubbles. But we did leave that checkpoint in a train with Rifka. She didn't even have to be searched and undressed!

I can't begin to describe the days that followed. As always, the trains were very overcrowded. To us to was all too familiar. We came to a temporary place called *Nachad.* There was a huge barn and some people that were already there were getting prepared to leave. We were supposed to come in and take their places. At the station we were provided with mattresses for the floor, some hot coffee and crackers. We had to stand in line since there was only a certain amount of mattresses and in order to get one you had to be right there and act quickly as the people left. I did not go for coffee; I went to grab the mattresses. So when the other people left, I grabbed three mattresses, one for each of us.

Now, waiting for my brother to come with some coffee, a commotion suddenly broke out. The people who had just left, came back. Their transport had been delayed. Out of nowhere came a woman built like a Russian Cossack, larger than life, who grabbed my mattresses. She started calling me names and claimed that the mattresses were hers. First of all, the mattresses all looked alike and secondly, I had never seen this woman before. I tried to talk to her intelligently but soon I saw that that would not work. I then used tough language - and my fists. Soon we were hitting each other. I was determined not to give in; I didn't want to lie on a stone cold floor without covers and a mattress.

Her husband was watching the whole fight. He finally came over and pushed her away from me, telling her that she was wrong. So now they started arguing between themselves. After she cooled off, I wouldn't talk to her, but I told her husband that my family could squeeze onto two mattresses and they could have the third. My brother never mixed in the fight because he said he didn't want to be hit by a woman! I was upset with him for not coming to help me. But the bystanders had a good time – to them it was a show!

Another story comes to my mind. While still in Uzbekistan, we three sisters took a walk in the streets like we used to do. Three young Uzbecks caught up to us and began annoying us, calling us names and blaming us for their suffering. They kept repeating themselves. We tried to avoid them, but eventually our nerves could not take it. I shouted, "Let's get them!" We turned around, grabbed those brats and punched them real good. They ran away. We came home and told Mom about our adventure. She looked at me and said, "No more of this. You will be very lucky if you do not wind up in a Russian jail forever!"

Now, back to the mattresses. In the morning we were told to get ready since we would be leaving soon. Nobody told us to prepare food or water. We were supposed to be provided with all this according to the Mizrachi organization. However, they were totally irresponsible. The train, as always, was packed to capacity. We were going to Austria via Czechoslovakia. The train did not stop for 15 hours. We were without drink or food. My brother Yosel suffered from hunger more than any of us. I had some crumbs in a bag from the last batch of crackers and I gave them to him.

With all these happenings, I thought of my parents and the rest of the family who were still waiting their turn to follow us. We really didn't know where we were going. By now we had already been separated for a few week. Only G-d knew how Mom was holding on; we had left Poland and she was in bad shape

Before entering Vienna the train stopped. We were ordered to get out. We were dehydrated and hungry and so we sat on the grass. It was midnight. A big truck came out and people began to runs towards it. Rifka and I could not move and so Yosel went to the truck and asked for some soup. They told him he needed to have a plate. On the train, about a half mile back, he had looked out the window and seen dishes. He walked back towards where he remembered seeing them on the side of the train tracks and he found the dishes. By the time he returned that truck had left, but he waited for another and finally got soup. When he finished it, he asked for more for us, but he was turned down. He was told that we had to come

ourselves and have our own plates ready. In the meantime, they took his dish away and said, "it belongs to the kitchen."

Rifka and I did not go anywhere and we sat there for many hours. Most people slept. We didn't We thought we were dying. Some kitchen workers passed around crackers and marmalade and we got some. We were stuck together with so many people, still not knowing where we were going. We knew we were right outside Vienna, but didn't know where they were taking us next. We were stuffed together in the train station; thousands of people waiting to find out their next move. We were frustrated from being shuffled in and out of the trains, from sitting on the grass and, as always, being filthy. With more and more people arriving at this station by train the food became harder to get. The situation was sickening.

While traveling from Czechoslovakia to Vienna, we were told by the Israeli Haganah boys that we would be traveling as Greeks. That meant that no other language could be spoken except Hebrew. We had a 10-year-old boy and his parents with us who spoke only Russian. We worked with this boy for hours, teaching him a few words of Hebrew in case he would be asked questions. At the border Russian soldiers walked into the train. They stared at us and then told each other that we were Polish and Russian Jews. One of the soldiers went a little further and started a conversation with that little boy, telling him that they knew him but just forgot his name. After a while the little boy panicked. He screamed aloud his name in Russian. The rest of us stood in silence awaiting the outcome of this situation. After a while, the soldiers left, and we all breathed a sigh of relief. We had overcome yet another obstacle.

We were supposed to be crossing the borders without problems. It had all been paid for by the Jewish organizations and smuggling us out of Europe was supposed to be done with a smooth transaction. It was not so. We were Jews!

The situation had been sickening. After a few days we were back on the train. The pattern was familiar - we were traveling not knowing where we were going. But again, what else was new? We came to another station while still in Vienna. I was so weak, but glad that the train had come to a stop and hoping that maybe, at last, we would be in a decent place and could get some food and rest. Perhaps we could find out where the rest of the family was and we wondered how Mom was doing. We were told that they were not too far behind us. We kept registering in every place that we were able, but still we could not find them. Vienna was a beautiful town known for its historical buildings, opera houses, and high standard of living. (It also became known for producing the biggest devil known as Hitler, a man who changed the world forever and almost destroyed mankind.) So, once again we went out of the train. And what we saw was absolutely shocking. The Viennese welcomed us with open arms - into a former concentration camp called Ebence, near Lindz. Here is the story of Ebence, one of the most dehumanizing places.

It was located three miles up on a hill. We were too exhausted to walk so we sat down on the tracks for a long time. Then an announcement came through a loud speaker saying that families with small children and older people would be provided with transportation. However, singles would have to walk, and that applied to us. We started walking and it took us a while, but we made it. Our first impression was that we had walked into hell. We saw frustrated people walking back and forth like

animals waiting to be slaughtered. There were long lines of mothers with children who couldn't stop crying. In the middle of the camp was a huge grave. Eighty thousand Jewish people had been murdered and buried there.

Next we saw the barracks; very big and drafty. In them were three lines of wooden platforms, so-called "beds," on which the inmates had slept and now were for our use. We were giving three thin blankets, one for each of us, not big enough to cover or use under us. A young man whom I knew recognized us, and without saying a word he could tell how we felt. He ran to the kitchen hoping to get some food for us. He fought everyone who was in his way and then fought with the cook. For whatever it took, he did bring us some food. A few minutes later we were surrounded by many people watching us eat. I felt sorry for them but ignored Mom's teaching and didn't share with anybody. There was not enough even for the three of us.

After regaining our strength we continued to tour the concentration camp of Ebence. We went to look at the ovens. We saw a black, brick wall with three open doors, side by side. One could see the ashes that were still inside the ovens. There were, as well, narrow tracks with iron wagons on them. We found human bones in them, in fact, it was easy to find human bones everywhere. We walked around clutching our hearts. The barbed wires were still intact. If one was not careful, he or she could easily be electrocuted. My heart kept asking me, "Why are we here? Why such inhumane treatment? It was already a year after the war and we were with the Americans. Is this the Final Solution – the American Way?"

Our anger and frustration were beyond description. The Mizrachi organization, which we had joined, was supposed to be taking care of us. They did a lousy job! We were totally neglected by them while other organizations were taking better care of their members. The others had enough food and drink. It looked like we were in the wrong place at the wrong time. We were suffering, not only physically but mentally, as well.

Rivke and I went for a walk and came up with an idea. We agreed that we have to escape from here. We began to work out a plan and wait for the right time. As we were sitting and discussing the escape plan, Rivka suddenly called my name. "Bashi, look what I found! A bunch of fresh plums - about twenty." At first we were afraid to touch them. Perhaps they were poisoned or belonged to someone else. Maybe there was a tree around here that grew fruit. We began to investigate the place and looked for fruit-bearing trees. There were none. It was so strange. We took that "fortune" and looked for brother Yosel. He, too, could not figure this out. So we decided to taste them slowly and we indulged ourselves. Then Yosel went to look for the fruit trees and he also came back puzzled. If this was not a miracle, then I don't know what is!

Three weeks of this hell was enough. The problem was how to escape. We couldn't use the main roads, we would have to use the hills. In a sitting position we would slide down the hills when the train would be at the station. We practiced, and needless to say it was not very comfortable sitting on pine needles, they were very slippery. For the next few weeks we walked around with needles in our buttocks. It was not easy to get rid of them. We also had to watch out so as not to bump into big trees while we were sliding.

Finally, the train came and we were on our way. Yosel told us that no matter where we could push ourselves in, to do it. So we jumped on the train. Where were we going? Who cared as long as we were out of there. The cattle cars on the train were packed to capacity. Most of the time there was standing room only. We were close to the doors of the car. Before leaving Ebence I had made sure to carry some empty cans to use for dishes. I hung them on a string and wore them around my waist. They made a lot of noise, but who cared? By now we were separated from the rest of the family for about two months. Only G-d knew if we still had a mother. Everywhere we went we asked people if they knew anyone by our family's names. The answer was always the same – no! As much as we missed the family, we were so happy that they weren't with us to witness this horror, especially Mom. G-d knows if she would have come out of that camp alive.

Now, for the first time, we knew that we were on our way to Germany. What awaiting us there nobody knew, except that it was so overcrowded. For the first time in a long time we were given more food more often. I don't remember exactly how long it took to reach Germany, but as always we came to a station, this one was called Firstnhagen. There were American soldiers with big trucks waiting for us. And once again it was off the train and onto the trucks. Since this happened at night, the soldiers used the headlights from the trucks. One of the African-American soldiers helped me get off the truck and suddenly I was surrounded by a few soldiers who were laughing hysterically at me. They kept looking at the empty cans around my waist. I must have looked like a nut. But how could I explain the reason for it, that without a can as a dish I couldn't get soup. They spoke English and I didn't!

It was just a short ride to an overnight stay in a huge empty barn. There we found only light military beds. The town was called Hessishlichtenau. We were not welcome in Germany either! However, we were protected by the American military police. Before entering the barn we went through a medical examination, the first in a long time. Rivke was already complaining that she felt ill. Sure enough, after the checkup she went to another room with other sick people. In the meantime, Yosel and I were looking for some beds. All were taken. There was only one corner which was empty, and that was because the window in it was broken and the wind blew in. We had no choice. We took that corner with no complaints. Hot coffee and cookies were available. It was very crowded. You couldn't walk from here to there. All of us were very tired. At midnight, when most people were snoring away, I went to look for Rivke. I found the room where the sick ones were and I found Rivke. I told her what happened and she only wanted to join us.

In the morning they began shipping people out to different camps. There were four camps near each other; Hertzog, Taichow, New Roshel and Goldcop. We wound up in Goldcop. Here there were three buildings which, before the war, were homes for German orphans. Now it was a displaced persons' camp. When we got there the camp was almost full with people. We got a room but had to share it with a couple and a child. No privacy again! So far, however, this was the best place we had been in. There was a kitchen here with plenty of soup and bread. There were even showers in the basement: Thursdays for women, Fridays for men. There were toilets in the hallways, they weren't private, but it beat going out into the backyards.

All we were missing was the rest of the family. So far we had not a hint of their whereabouts. It drove us crazy.

It is 1946, one year after the war. My family is in three countries. My parents, together with my married sister is in Poland, waiting to get out. My older brother is traveling around searching for survivors. The younger brother is serving time in Stalin's Siberian jungle. He has been there since 1940, serving six years out of 10. His hope is amnesty.

Life in camp was a mixed bag. We were free to come and go. We had our own militia. They were not allowed to carry weapons. We were under some restrictions. The Holocaust survivors tries hard to make a comeback to civilization. Although we were one people, one language, one religions, we were not fully united. Just the opposite, we were pretty much apart on many issues. But after learning about each other's survival, we became known as "you" from Kacet (concentration camp) number one sufferer; and "me" from Soviet, a second-hand sufferer.

It was difficult in the beginning, but time healed us in the long run. We tried to overcome the division. I remember discussions about religion. That's were we found the widest division. Some expressed their decision never to turn to religioin again, claiming "Where was G-d? when we needed him," and who's to blame them. But slowly the campers began to assume a normal life. I will not deny that if not for my Dad I probably would have joined the non-religious group, especially after Mom died. I was angry at G-d and lost trust in His Judgment. Mom, on the other hand, believed that better days and a better life lay ahead. She kept injecting us with her beliefs, assuring us that the bad experiences would fade away in time. Sometimes we even began to accept her ideas, but in he end it all fell apart. The high hopes melted away like ice on hot day.

After my first shower in almost six years, what can I say? I went to bed and I don't know how long I slept. We began to put together some sort of life here. The Camp offered evening courses in English or Hebrew. An ORT school opened. We met other girls and made new friends. Rivka was offered a job in the office, but she was more interested in going back to school so she gave the job to Yosel. He became very busy. He was the bookkeeper and he made a few changes. Instead of staying in line for the dry ingredients for soup, they were distributed to everyone without the lines and we all cooked for ourselves. He knew that when our parents would come they would approve of this decision. My parents did not use kitchen soups, they lived on bread and tea.

This camp was different. All of us were Holocaust survivors. I watched carefully how each of us dealt with this new life. Some mourned a long time, like Mom, and some did not. They claimed that they were done with it. Others expressed their pain by suppressing it, like my Dad. Others were just too plain busy looking for their lost youth. To some, mingling with the Germans in the town came rather easily. This began with exchanging goods out of necessity, which lead to doing business like hiring some German women for domestic help. Sometimes it even led to marriages. Lack of education didn't help our situation, but in spite of it all, life went on. Everyone was busy with something. In fact, one could hardly keep up with the weddings that took place in the camp. We, on the other hand, weren't interested in marriage yet. Nothing interested us except getting back with the rest of the

family. There was supposed to be only a few weeks of separation. It had already been a month and the waiting took its toll on all of us.

When we left Russia we thought that we were going home to start a new life. Instead, we began a new life on the run and a camp life. No wonder we all suffered from depressions and disappointments. It felt like we just came out of the wilderness and we had difficulty rejoining the human race. Being so different from other people, everything looked so strange to us. We had to face hard new challenges, our destiny was uncertain. The doors to the world were locked to us. Our lives were empty and our energy all used up. How does one begin again? Every bad experience leaves one with a scar. All this, and the suffering from the losses of life, took its toll. Camp life was a constant reminder of the past. I witnessed little laughter among the young people. We looked more like a people who were afraid of life rather than enjoying it. We had no choice. With so many obstacles to overcome the survivors had only two tools, courage and determination. We told each other the miracles of our survival, but no one can tell it all. I remember discussions with young people. They were very boring, if not at the beginning than towards the end. Hitler or Stalin horror stories had to be mentioned sooner or later. Then the spark of life became dimmed.

In order to keep going and find some direction in life, we kept the lights on all the time. My feeling was that the outside world was not ready yet to accept us as ordinary people from the free world. After all, we were known as stateless, homeless refugees. We were called many names: the DP refugees, the "greeners," from Kacet, others from the Soviet. Even amongst ourselves the second generation also say that their parents are Holocaust survivors. Not only were we condemned but marked like cattle for life and, combined with camp life, it was a prescription for a lifetime of anger. In camp we had freedom of movement but with some restrictions. The camp police did not carry weapons and they were Holocaust survivors themselves as well as residents of the camp. They were under the watchful eye of the American Military Police (known as the MP). However, it felt like some sort of imprisonment with privileges. This didn't mean that our apartments were not searched from time to time with no search warrants needed. I remember the first Aliyah to Israel that began in 1948. Many survivors left the camp and emigrated to Israel. The Israeli Haganah boys who were stationed in Germany helped us to move on but their main mission was to smuggle weapons out of Germany. Thank G-d they were successful!

As for the rest of the family, we later learned about their bitter journey. After we left Poland, Mirl moved in with our parents. They delayed leaving Poland a few times because of Mom's health. One time they were told that delaying too many times would cause them more hardships, and for the elderly and children there was not much transportation available. Therefore, when the next trip came along, they took it. At every stop they looked for a doctor or some painkillers. To my sorrow they were not always successful.

They finally reached Vienna. That's when all hell broke loose. All of them were squashed into a small room in an old dilapidated hotel, but at least they were together. Mom's health did not improve. One day she asked Mirl to take her to a dentist. She thought that perhaps all her pain came from a bad tooth and she decided to have the tooth pulled. They went to an Austrian dentist who had not yet

parted with his Nazi past. He told Mirl to stay outside while he pulled Mom's tooth and she nearly died listening to Mom screaming. He told them later that he had no novocaine or painkillers. From there they rushed Mom to a hospital where, except for giving her a few painkillers, she was totally ignored. After a few days Mom asked to be taken out of that hospital. She couldn't stay there and look those Nazi murderers in the eye. Mirl did whatever was possible to help Mom and then hey found out that the tooth had been a healthy one – all this pain for nothing!

Just when they hoped to leave Vienna, the baby took sick and was taken to the hospital. He came down with pneumonia. The hospital only wanted the baby, but Mirl said, "No way will I leave my baby here alone." She put up a fight – and won. For the next two weeks she sat on a chair near the baby. They did not offer her a bed or food, not even a drink. My brother-in-law was not allowed in. He stood outside talking to my sister through the window. Meanwhile, Mom and Dad were left by themselves. All my Dad could do was to boil hot water and make tea for Mom. One time a nun came to take the baby for a bath. There was not even hot water in the hospital, besides he still had fever. It shows you how much they cared!

Mirl came down with a high fever and had to stay in the hospital. She too had come down with pneumonia and she was afraid that now she would be separated from the baby. How would she fight the hospital and stay? She had an idea. She put the baby on her stomach and tied him around her body. For the next two weeks she stayed in one position – on her back. I don't know how one can describe this agony. After a month in the hospital she came home, all the family now holding on to life.

The time came when they had to leave Vienna. They traveled the same road we had. Mirl told us that the trip for Mom was very painful. There was no eating or enough rest and more pain. It was impossible to watch her suffering. They decided not to stop anywhere but to keep going until they reached us. By then we had been separated for seven months. Their first stop was in Badrichenhald, Germany. Here they received information about us and without notification or wasting any time they continued to Goldcup.

Finally, we had the surprise – they were here! Our first look was enough to make us nearly drop dead. They looked like they had just walked out of a concentration camp. We hugged for hours. I just couldn't let go of Mom, but I was afraid I would break her thin bones. This was followed by hours of bitter tears that wouldn't stop. Now we needed to get a bigger apartment in the camp, but it was not so easy. It took some fighting on my part. We did get a bigger room but we had to take in a single man. His name was Singer and he was no match for our family.

The next few weeks and months were very busy ones, especially with Mom. The camp had only one nurse and very little medication, but just knowing that in case help was needed, there was someone out there, and that was a relief. In fact, the nurse came quite often to check on Mom. Mirl got a room on the same floor, right next to us. As soon as Mom could talk, the first question she asked was if we knew anything about Chaim and Yitzhak. We had to tell her the truth, that we had not heard from either of them. Mom took it very hard. We began to work on all fronts to get a better bed for Mom. I joined the ORT school and Yosel worked in the office. Rivke prepared herself for school away from the camp. By now she knew English

well enough. My brother-in-law got a job in the ORT school as a mechanical teacher. Dad opened a *shul* and began to teach children some *Yiddishkeit*. Slowly Mom gained a little weight and to see her lifting her grandson and playing with him was a miracle.

We got a surprise - a letter from Chaim. He wrote that he spent a long time searching for his family hoping to find them alive, but to no avail. He then decided to remain in Poland and wait for Yitzhak. As much as Mom missed him she was happy to hear that Chaim was waiting for his brother. Mom got a little stronger, kept playing with her grandson, took walks around the camp and spent some time outside. She met other people, some women her own age. But with all this Mom's heart and mind was some place else. She had received enough information about what happened in the concentration camps.

It 's spring 1947. A long-awaited letter finally came from brother Yitzhak. Mom was sick so I read the letter to her. She watch the movement of my eyes and lips carefully. In this letter Yitzhak tried to tell us not to build our hopes too high that he might be free one day. He used Hebrew words so we would understand that the punishment was too harsh for him to take, so I tried to avoid those words. When I finished reading she looked at me and said, "That's all? Are you finished?" I should have known better and told her the truth. But she knew what to say not to embarrass me. "Why do you need to read it to me? I know how to read."

This is only one episode among so many where she knew how to get you out of a corner without feeling guilty. That was Mom's trademark. She knew how to heal wounds, lift spirits, smooth out lies, and not make you feel guilty. I don't know anyone else who could do all this with such gentleness, yet with a strong message. We all benefited from it. As hard as she tried to cope with and suppress her pain in front of us her suffering showed through. Now and then we witnesses happy moments, especially in camp when relatives found relatives. We had been waiting for such a reunion but it did not happen for Mom. Her two sisters, three brothers, her mother – all ashes. Ethel's husband and two boys, Pearl and her husband and two boys and whomever we left home were all gone. And now Chaim was in Poland and Yitzchak in Russia.

Yosel met a young lady, Yetta Weiss, who lived in the same camp as we did and who had also survived the war in Russia with her family. Mom was so happy about it. By then we had already seen a change in Mom. She began to lose weight, her appetite was not the same and she ate very little. At night we caught her crying. For us the world turned upside down. A local doctor suggested that she see a specialist in Frankfurt Amine. Yosel took Mom to see this doctor. After his examination he told my brother - without Mom listening in - that she had only seven to eight months to live. Mom did not ask Yosel what the doctor said but instead she told him, "I know what I have. Promise me that you won't tell the children anything." The children were Rivka and me. To honor Mom's wish Yosel kept the secret from us. Watching the drastic change in Mom scared us terribly but I had seen Mom sick so many times that I tried not to think that this was a hopeless situation. For a very long time Mom kept a straight face, suppressing the pain as long as she could.

After I graduated from Ort, I got a job in the Ort school as a teacher. Mom bought me a Singer sewing machine as a graduation present that I still have and cherish today. She also brought me a lady's bicycle; I had always wanted one. As a teacher I only worked a few hours a day so I could be with Mom most of the time. At times she would refuse to eat because of the difficulties she had in swallowing, and although she didn't want us to see the way she suffered, the weakness worsened. She preferred to lie in bed rather than walk. I often ran to Yosel or Mirl for help and panicked when Mom couldn't swallow.

After being in and out of the hospitals, the next time she went the doctors made an opening in her stomach and inserted a small tube. In order to feed her we were given a longer tube that we had to connect to the small one. The tube was made out of glass and quite narrow. I cooked vegetables for hours because it had to be nearly liquid, and without a strainer or blender the mashing had to be done by hand. Not only was that hard to do, but frustrating also. I was terrified that the food would not go through the narrow tube. After feeding her, I pulled out the longer attached tube, washed it, sterilized it, and kept it clean. I did the best I could, but nothing goes smoothly. One time, after feeding Mom, something went wrong. When I took the tube out to be cleaned I saw a piece of glass from the top was missing. I looked for it everywhere. Mom was shaken and troubled and asked me what happened. I burst into tears and cried hysterically. I showed her that a piece of glass was missing and she begged me not to cry, saying that this would not kill her. I never found that piece of glass.

The doctor who was supposed to take care of her was a tall German with a stone face who did not wish to be called too often. His suggestion was to keep her in a hospital, but we knew that this would finish her off faster. Mom asked us not to put her in the hospital anymore, she did not want to die in that hospital with her worst enemies at her bedside. In the meantime, she needed more and more morphine. First we had to ask the doctor for a prescription then travel to Kassel, the next town. It took one hour each way. Then we had to beg the doctor to come and inject the medication. I cannot describe this hell. Since we did not listen to the doctor or his suggestions he took his time coming to her or refused to come altogether. Imagine, we kissed his hands and dropped to our knees; we gave all the cigarettes and chocolates, whatever we had, to this Nazi. All this didn't matter to him. He acted like a real Nazi and to this day I hate this Dr. Feller with all my heart.

It's now May of 1948, and what a surprise. We received a letter from Yitzhak that he was out of jail and free in Poland. The two brothers were reunited at last. Mom took the news not only with happiness and disbelief, but straight to her heart. For a long time she prayed to Hashem, and thanked Him for this miracle. We later learned that Yitzhak had nothing left to his name. He had torn shoes and clothing from a beggar. After receiving this news from Poland, Rivka and I immediately sent care packages to both brothers, paid for by us.

Chaim, on the other hand, worked as a director in a school under a Polish named of Henek Sadowski. This wasn't all; he was also warned that if he didn't join the Communist party he would lose his job. Life in Poland was no different than in Russia. The borders were closed. In fact, both of them tried to escape from Poland, but were caught on the Polish-Czech border and were thrown in jail. It took weeks

and a friend with money to get them out. The brothers wanted so much to see Mom alive, but they never made it.

The next months were crucial. Mom was getting thinner and thinner and she needed morphine more often. That again meant my running to the doctor and standing in front of him, a Nazi, begging him and crying out for help. He couldn't have cared less! He never forgot to remind us that Mom belonged in a hospital. That cold murderer's look tore my heart out. Oh, how I wished I had a gun to use on him just like those that were used on us. He reminded me of the Nazis I saw for the first time when they marched into town. I looked at Dr. Feller's face and saw Hitler himself. We had to take turns dealing with him and there were times we went to pieces, but there was no other way.

Sitting near Mom's bed, watching her fight for life, a terrible anger was building up inside me. What came to my mind were the plans Mom had for us. Way back when she would say, "When we get back to civilization there will be organizations that will provide help. We will have to work harder in order to make up for the lost years during the war." She talked about America and even knew a few words in English, Two of my uncles had immigrated to the United States during the 1920s. They had returned to Poland a few times for visits and they couldn't talk enough about the country.

Sometimes I tried to have some conversations with her. Once I told Mom that the United Nations was voting and it looked like there might soon be a Jewish State. Mom's eyes turned to the heavens and with tears in her eyes she made a *bracha*, a blessing. She also knew immigration for her was not possible. All those years she had worked so hard and given the last pennies away for *Keren Kayemet*. I kept asking myself why couldn't she immigrate? How she would have liked to get out of this forsaken country of Germany. At times, out of frustration, I had to show my anger to my Dad. I questioned him; "Where is justice?" He had one answer; "God, in His judgment, is right. That is what our religion teaches us." I could not buy that.

Sitting near Mom, I felt I was watching a movie and like some sort of reflection of a time not so long ago. A thousand things came to my mind of the few years I had with Mom. I remembered when, at age seven coming out of school, I always made a stop at the market where Mom sold bakery goods. There was always something to take home - vegetables, fruits or money for an ice cream. But most of all I remembered the little time I had with Mom all to myself. Before going home she would remind me to wake up Dad. He was a baker and slept during the day. I would change my school uniform, stop by the *langer* Yosel, the tall Yosel, who had a store with the best whitefish in town. That was my favorite food, but many times Mom was not at the stand. Her neighbor was a woman who depended on my Mom and couldn't live without her. Her name was Machla Bok. When I would ask her where Mom was, she would look straight into my eyes, touch my forehead and, with a smile on her face, tell me that Mom is helping to deliver a baby, or was helping a child who fell, or a child who was sick or needed *bankis*.

What is *bankis*? It's an old remedy used for some sicknesses or pain. It was very popular in the old days, especially in Europe. *Bankis* was the cheapest and most affordable medical care. It was widely used in winter to help colds, back pain

and the flu. It was a small glass with a round bottom. Mom had quite a few of them. She kept them neat, sterilized, packed and always ready to be used in an emergency. This is how it works: a little wooden stick with a cotton ball on top is dipped in alcohol and lit. The flame is then put inside the glass, then the hot glass, or *bankis*, is put on the patient's lightly greased back. About two dozen in all are used. This procedure has to be done very fast. The patient is covered and remains face down for a little while until the *bankis* takes effect. Then, they are taken off. The back is left with red blotches, but the patient swears that he or she feels good.

One of the other stories I know only from listening or hearing others talk about. My brother Yitzhak, as a young boy, caught strep throat from a friend. This sickness killed so many young people and was very painful. Kids usually choked to death. Mom bought turpentine and added her own concoction to it. She always had sterilized linen on hand. She would then roll one finger with a piece of line dipped in the medicine and shove it down the throat of a sick person as deep as she could go, killing all the germs. In those days there was no penicillin or antibiotics. Only Mom could do this treatment and she used it on so many and saved so many kids from dying. And how many twisted or broken legs Mom dealt with! As busy as she was, nothing could keep her away from saving a life and helping those stricken ones with the medications she put together. Mom's list of missions was as long as a laundry list. She fought against poverty, illiteracy, hunger, and for women's rights for independence and a Jewish homeland. Unfortunately, she did not live long enough to see some of the results for which she had fought so hard. I compare my Mom to Moses!

Mom never panicked when she found herself in a serious situation. On the contrary, she handled problems with the care and knowledge of a pro. She handled every situation different, as if it came with instructions. I often wonder where this extraordinary knowledge came from and how Mom could save so many lives.

So many women could not read or write, including her friend, Machla. There were so many illiterate people and for those, Mom was a secretary. She would write letters for them and read the answers to them. Mom never spoke of anything she wrote or read and protected people's privacy. Another story comes to mind. The German arrested men of all ages, marching them out of town and keeping them for days without food or drink. The younger guys who dared, broke away, taking their lives in their hands. A few of them knocked on our door. Mom let them in. We had about 15 men hiding in our attic and if the Germans had caught us, they would hang us all. Mom took a tremendous risk. Thank God, we saved them all.

Years later, no matter where we happened to be, people whom I did not know or could not remember recognized us and many, with tears in their eyes, would thank us and praise Mom. They kept saying, "If not for your mother, I would not have survived." The truth is that we don't know to this day how many lives Mom saved. It looks like God could not do this by Himself so he chose Mom to help.

All I can say is that I feel like screaming; that it's not fair that now she needs to be saved and we can't do anything for her. I will say it again, with a lot of pain in my heart, I am angry and so frustrated. We did a lot of fasting and praying. My Dad kept shuffling the pages of the prayer book day and night without a stop: all in vain.

Sometimes my mind wandered far back and I try to remember the so-called "normal" days when we were all together. As kids we took everything for granted. We were eight children, and with Mom and Dad we were ten, plus some workers, at a Shabbos table or a holiday. How wonderful it was! I remember Mom's Shabbos and holiday outfits. They were not very expensive, but neat, especially her wine-colored velvet dress with a white lace collar and sleeves with white lace cuffs. She wore it with black silk shoes that had one strap across that closed with a little button, and a very neat wig. She looked so classy! She had a beautiful round face with the most gentle brown eyes, a pleasant smile, and intelligence written all over her. With her well-proportioned shape and gorgeous legs you could not help but notice her, and she was loved and respected by the whole town.

She wore that outfit mostly to weddings. Mom never took us along to a wedding unless it was family. She believed that it was not ethical or fair to the people whose *simcha* it was to bring children. On the other hand some people brought their kids to the weddings for one reason - to get them something to eat! For some kids it was a chance to fill up their stomachs. The poverty that so many had to deal with was out of hand. Our family worked hard. Mom made sure that we stayed together and that there was no jealousy. She also made sure that we were united and treated each other with respect. We tried to please our parents because Mom was part of us just as we were part of her. She enjoyed being around us and could easily relate to every age.

She made our friends feel welcome. In the winter time Chaim, with his golden voice, would organize a quartet and we would sing songs and God help you, you were out if you couldn't carry a tune! Mom loved that very much. We also listened to Chaim's achievements in school and the latest movies he saw. Everyone took a turn to say something. Friday nights after meals friends of my sisters and brothers would come into the bakery where we had an empty room. There we taught each other the latest dance steps and told jokes. We talked about books, the latest fashions, engagements and weddings. Our family grew bigger. Two sisters were married; then came grandsons, and Mom was in seventh heaven. She was always busy doing good deeds for others. That was her devotion. As hard as it is, I still live with those memories and the truth is they never left me.

Suddenly, a bitter cry came from Mom and that brought me back to reality. Mom knew that she would not be around for too long. She suggested that my brother get married and an engagement was announced two months later. In the meantime, Mom's body was shrinking; the pain worsened. Helpless, we watched her turn into a skeleton. Once again silence and sorrow and depression took over our lives. Yosel agreed to get married sooner rather than later. The preparation for that wedding was done in the most painful way. Some of the ideas we got from Mom. It took us a week together with my sister-law's family to prepare the wedding. To our sorrow that was the second wedding in which Mom could not fully participate, and that was the last wedding Mom witnessed.

It wasn't easy to put all this together in a camp, even though we did not have to send out invitations, or worry about who would sit with whom, or where the family would stay, and other normal things. The "families" were the people from camp, and we didn't care who was there. Our problem was a dying mother. How

could she hold on a few hours in such pain? I remember the large room where all the weddings took place. It had long tables with benches. There was no music or special decoration and Dad prepared and performed the ceremony himself. To the people in camp, a wedding meant something to do; a get-together and fun. For us, it was a terrible experience. We were all very happy for my brother and we wished the couple well.

The wedding took place in Camp Goldcup on September 4, 1948. After a few hours I took Mom back to the house. She had enough and I could not longer watch the people staring at her. I don't know how long the people were celebrating or when it ended, but as soon as Mom lay down in her bed she thanked God for giving her this opportunity to see her son married. When the wedding was over the family gathered around her. We were all very happy that it was over and that she made it.

The house changed. Yosel began a new life and that meant he had less time for us. What lay ahead is so painful, I can't write about it. My struggle and responsibilities shortened my life. I began to notice my loss of weight so I totally withdrew from all activities. I was no longer interested in life itself. My life and the world had crumbled under my feet. At times I had to run to Mirl or to Yosel for help, even in the middle of the night. Dad's suffering was, as always, in silence. The family was torn to pieces. At times we acted like strangers all lost in the wilderness. Under these circumstances, no longer was it possible to act as a family.

The situation became worse and the time was running out for Mom. She was fighting for her life. The words she said and which haunted us for years were, "To die in this forsaken land, in Germany yet!" That's the reason why we decided, years later, to transfer Mom's body to Israel. Dad prepared himself for the worse. He constantly looked in the *halachic* book for answers. How and what is one supposed to do in a situation like this? That meant a lot to him. One day, I walked into the house and Dad was sitting near Mom's bed. He looked white as a ghost, shaking his head, and the conversation between them stopped immediately. For years I begged my Dad to tell me what Mom had said to him, but he never revealed his secret. His answer was, "I can't share this with anybody. It is all for me." As far as I know Dad took the conversation with him to his grave.

The following days and nights blended into one hell, and the doctor refused to come just when he was needed the most. The medication was harder to get and it did not help very much anymore. The High Holidays were upon us and Dad was busy preparing for the season. It was a time when every Jew asks God for forgiveness, prays for health, for a better life, and so on. I felt that I was running out of prayers. We fasted so often, we prayed for a *refuah* (blessing). Dad spent days and nights praying his heart out, begging Hashem for a miracle. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur had come and gone, the *shul* that Dad put together was beneath our apartment. Mom could hear every word. She kept *davening* and praying all by heart just to keep up with the tradition. At times she had to stop and could not go on, all because of the terrible pain. She kept reminding me to take her grandson, little Shia, to *shul*. They will blow the shofar, she would say. She never missed an opportunity.

I kept Mom clean. I often washed her body. This time it was different, it was as if she wanted to say something to me and could not find the right words. That

was not like her. I had the feeling that she wanted to say, "I will not bother you for too long anymore." It was a few days before Hoshana Raba. Mom called me over and asked me if I would do her a favor. She wanted me to cut her hair, cut her nails and wash her body the way she would tell me to do. Without hesitation, I agreed. An electric shock went through my spine. My heart sank to my knees. For the first time in my life I saw and touched a dying body. The flesh was gone; a thin skin covered her bones. I followed the instructions she gave me while a big bubble formed in my throat. In spite of it all the beautiful shape she once had and the gorgeous legs were still visible.

After I finished washing her, she fell asleep. I ran to Mirl and totally broke down and before we knew we were drowning in our tears together. I felt that this was the end and I would never touch Mom again. That day felt very strange, like before an explosion instead of a joyous time. I felt sick all over, and betrayed by God. I had a lot of pain and anger. Why this? Why now? We called the doctor because Mom had difficulties breathing. She was in agony. In the evening of Hoshana Raba the doctor came, as always with that cold-blooded look on his face. He looked us over and the message was written all over his face. He then gave Mom a quick check-up and that was the beginning of the end. He gave Mom the deadly injection that stopped her heart and left with a sign of relief and a loud "good night" in German.

At that time we were in the house. We stood around Mom's bed and it's a moment I cannot forget. I also can't describe what was going on in my mind. But I remember saying that Mom also died as a victim of a Nazi doctor. We all watched her heart whistle, but not ready to give up yet. I personally feel that the rest of my life I will have to live with a part of me that was taken away by Mom. I wish I could pinpoint what it is exactly, but I can't. It's over 50 years since all this took place. I still don't feel differently. The missing part is with me forever; I never fully recuperated from it.

Early in the morning of *Shemini Atzeret*, my Dad called in some women. They told him, "The rest of the family has to leave the room. Mom can't die while we are in the room." What that means I don't know, but as soon as we left the room Mom's heart came to a stop. A few minutes later we were called back in. Mom's body was on the floor and a candle was burning hear her. Dad asked us to pray for forgiveness, it's called *mechila*. All I wanted to do was wake her up and in no way could I part my lips from crying hysterically so they let me out of the room. By then the services were stopped in *shul*. Everyone went home. We gathered in Mirl's apartment and poured our hearts out.

Since it was a holiday there were difficulties in putting the burial together. Dad, Yosel and Moshe took care of it all. Dad wanted Mom to be buried the same day. At sundown we went to the cemetery, only this was not a regular cemetery. It was a place given to us outside of the cemetery. It was more like a ditch. Mom was place on a board, covered with a white sheet, the one she prepared for herself. All of us added up only to eight persons, not even a *minyan*. According to the Jewish law 10 people are supposed to be present. The men did the digging and the burying. It was so unfair and sickening to watch. Dad performed the ceremony. We left the

place where Mom's body lay with a small sign with a Jewish star and her name on it. That was near Kassel.

We missed Mom beyond description. We each felt as if we were stripped naked. Life without Mom was never the same for all of us. We missed that magic touch that had kept us together through thick and thin, and when that was gone, the family fell apart. None of us captured her talent for being a leader. For years I suffered from lack of supervision and guidance. Mom was irreplaceable in my opinion. She had built a bridge of hope for all of us; and then one day that bridge collapsed and everything came to a standstill. God knows it was not our fault. We can't blame any of us but nevertheless at times we all feel that maybe Mom got sick because of us. She worked too hard to save us, maybe we could have done more for her but we didn't know what. Thoughts like this are self-inflicted pain; all because we had difficulty accepting the loss.

After *Simchat Torah* we sat down for *shiva* - mourning period. All of us felt sick and broken-hearted. Dad gave us instructions as to how to act according to *Halacha* (the rules). I listened, but I had difficulty accepting it. All I could hear myself saying was that it was not worth living anymore. Mom tried to prepare us for the most interesting life that lay ahead. She was fascinated with airplanes, but never got the chance to fly in one. She wanted to travel to other countries and visit new places, but instead her remains were brought to Israel by plane in a small iron casket to be buried for the second time. Oh, how she prayed for a washing machine! She felt that washing clothing by hand was hard physical labor for a woman. She even assured me that I would have one. Yes Mom, I have a washing machine! Mom, we were all so lucky to have you as our mother. There is really nothing to add to your perfection and I sure wish you had lived longer. To die at 62 from a dreadful disease such as you had, and in a camp without much help, was not fair. That's why we are living with such devastating pain and memories. All this was so long ago, but it is all so vivid in my mind.

In the Spring of 1948, Camp Goldcup was closed. This was a few months after Mom died. We were transferred to a different camp called Yeger Kaserne. This camp was once a military base and was now a displaced person' camp for refugees. It was a much bigger camp than Goldcup and located in the town of Kassel. It gave us a chance to visit Mom's grave a few times. Due to immigration, small camps were the first ones closed, that's why we were concentrated into larger camps such as Yeger Kaserne. Here we met new Holocaust survivors and the stories were all the same.

Camp life looked the same everywhere. Here we were surrounded by those poor defeated Germans who complained how hard life was for them. They couldn't get enough food and other merchandise and they suffered while we still didn't know where destiny would lead us. All you had to do was look around and see the beautiful homes the Germans lived in, going off to work everyday, dressed very well, cars zooming by in the streets, opera houses and cafes packed to capacity, living a normal life. There was no remorse for what happened to us, as if they had nothing to do with our tragedy. Some of them went so far as to say that they were related to the Jewish faith, but as always, America came to the rescue. And with that Marshall Plan that poured millions of dollars into Germany, the economy took off and in no

time it became the most prosperous country in Europe. For them, all was given and forgotten. A short time later we heard from our American relatives that they had sent us affidavits. It gave us new hope for a new country, a home and a new lease on life.

It 's now July 1949. Our documents came through the HIAS. It looked like everything was okay. In a very short time we and other survivors were told to pack and be ready for the next trip, which meant another stopover at a camp still in Germany. That was Vildflacken. The place was in the hilly part of the country surrounded by forests and hills. Obviously it looked picture-perfect, but inside the camp was just like the others. By now we were separated from our old friends and we already made new ones. To visit Mom's grave would not be possible anymore and we were saddened by that.

The free time in camp was again spent with medical check-ups and filling out questionnaires. The food in the kitchen was awful, in fact the bread was never fresh. So a group of young people decided to take a walk to the village and buy fresh bread for a change. Rivka and I went along with them. We chose to take a short cut and went through the woods. The scenery was nice and the air was so fresh. We made our purchases and headed back to camp, when out of nowhere came a bunch of German Shepherd dogs, some as big as me. They began to attack us tearing pieces of flesh out of our bodies. We panicked and threw the bread away trying to run from them. What was so painful was that the owners of these dogs, the Germans, watched the way they attacked us and did not even come to our rescue. Just the opposite, they were laughing and having fun. One of the young men who was with us, Shalom Rosenberg, had his legs torn to pieces. In fact, he was hospitalized, went through surgery, missed the departure time and was left in the camp a while longer. A month later, we met him in the United States, and we talked about this incident.

After some weeks in Vildflechen, they prepared us for another trip to a new camp called Bremenhaffn. We were sick and tired of packing and unpacking. It seemed as if this merry-go-round would never end.

It's July of 1949. Vildflechen is history by now. We are on the way to Bremenhaffen. I don't remember how long it took us to get there. The days, months, even years, did not seem to matter anymore. We not only lost touch with the world but with the calendar as well. So far we were still in Germany, in Bremenhaffen. This was the last camp and the last stop before leaving for the United States.

The camp was huge. Here I faced more difficulties and troubles than in all the other camps. The medical committee was made up of Germans and American Red Cross doctors. Every week I had to have a medical examination. I was underweight and had black patches on my lungs. That's what I was told by the doctors. They said I was not fit to immigrate to the United States. They told me they had a plan for me; I had to check into a hospital and recuperate, then they would fly me to the United Sates by plane. In the meantime Yosel and Yette were leaving camp for America, and Mirl and her family were getting ready, too.

Dad and Rivka refused to leave without me. I had five weeks of torture and I had had enough! I decided to do something about it. The last time I was called in for a check-up the doctors said the same thing. I began to scream and cry and then threatened that I would commit suicide. The doctors told me that my decision was

wrong, that this was a tough trip and I might not make it. The truth is I did take a terrible chance. Later I found out on the ship that I weighed all of 90 pounds. I was so sick and at times, even unconscious. But, thanks to a doctor whose sympathy I won, I eventually did make that trip.

Another reason for staying together was that Dad and I have only one affidavit, which meant we had to travel together; one could not go without the other. The doctors' plan was to send my Dad to another camp and to wait for me there. I didn't want to be separated anymore, and for him it would have been suffering. He did not eat in the kitchens.

I had no choice. While we were in Bremenhaffen we were with other nationalities and, as always, Jews were not welcome. One evening my Dad, walking back to his barracks from the evening prayer, was attacked by a bunch of anti-Semites. They began calling him names like "Jew bastard," pouring water on him and cursing him. I had had enough! That's when I made the decision to leave. We had enough of Europe, especially Germany. Frankly, I didn't mind dying. My life was full enough with painful experiences. What bothered me, though, was to die on the ship and be thrown into the ocean for the fish to feed on. It looked apparently as though my time was not yet up; there was more trouble ahead, but in different ways and in different times.

After years of being stateless we finally found a place we could call home. We're grateful for the United States, for the opportunity given to us after so many countries had closed their doors. Right after setting down, we began to talk about transferring Mom's remains from Germany to Israel. It was quite a struggle; quite an ordeal. We had to deal with three countries: Germany, Israel and the United States. Yes, we suffered setbacks. Israel was a young country fighting for her survival. Other countries weren't very interested in helping us. All in all, it took 35 years, but the time did come and it was done.

In 1983 it all came together. All of us went to Israel. Yitzhak put an ad in the newspapers about the funeral. The children and grandchildren and all who knew her came. I only knew Mom a little over 20 years. Usually it takes that long to build a good relationship and an understanding between parents and children, but the short time we had together was the most valuable time in my life. It was not only what she said or did, but rather how she said or did it. The good times were so few and it was amazing that she held up the way she did during the bad times. I can't begin to describe it. She had remarkable inner strength and we knew that she did everything she could to save us. She wanted us not only to survive but to tell the story to the world and carry on. She wanted us to tell about the atrocities and the sufferings of our loved ones.

She knew more than we imagined. In fact, our coming to the camp in Germany answered lots of questions. Mom was sure that she knew what really happened in the concentration camps; that's where her troubles began. Also, she then found out that she was the only survivor from her family. Her three brothers and two sisters and her mother vanished. It looked like all her energy was used up and the little remaining strength was not enough to fight with and go on living. We, and those who knew her, found it easy to love her. She was a natural. Everything she did was done with honesty, decency and above all, with class. Mom did not

believe that charity began at home but rather where it was needed. In our house the doors were always open and so was Mom's heart. I was not always pleased with it but then, I could not understand the importance of her actions. I have some regrets, but doesn't everybody? There were untold stories about her youth in those dark ages. How had she become so different? Was it really a gift from God or hard work and determination? I will never know the answer.

There was one story I loved to listen to. Mom's father had finally agreed to send her to *cheder*, a Jewish school, to learn. She had begged him for a long time. Finally she succeeded in convincing him with the help of her brother, Yosel, who could not live without her. After a little while the Rebbe from that yeshiva told her father that she was the best student in class. For a girl, that was unheard of. He also told her father that he had to take her out of the *cheder*. The funniest thing was her brother's response. He said he would also drop out of yeshiva because he could not do without a girl. What he meant was, without her. This did not stop Mom from learning on her own, and the results were amazing.

A favorite story of Mom's was the story about my Bubbie's heroism. How do I describe this gorgeous looking young man, Mom's youngest brother, Labish He was six feet tall, built like a statue, with light brown hair and dark brown eyes. He had no need for glasses. He also had beautiful white teeth, in other words he was picture perfect. With all those qualifications, the Polish army chose him to serve in the cavalry. This was considered an honor and a privilege, especially for a Jew. In that military uniform he looked superb, just as if he was born for it. Since he was the youngest son and lived at home with Bubbie he was her provider. After he was drafted into the army, my Bubbie was left alone. She decided to fight back claiming that she couldn't support herself. Her two oldest sons had served in the army so she wanted him, the youngest, to be released from army duties. She traveled every week to the army base where he was stationed, even in the worst weather, insisting on seeing the army officials. When she was asked what she wanted, she would say, "My son." Many times she would sneak in through the iron gates. She did not speak Polish so if they asked her where she was going, she would say "I'm going straight," crying, "I want my son." They put her request down many times, but she did not give up. She continued to do the same thing over and over. I don't know how long it took or how many trips Bubbie made, but thanks to her devotion, he was released of his army duties. That was my sweet Bubbie Chaya, of blessed memory.

My Uncle Yosel, with whom Mom was so close, was the eldest of her three brothers. They shared ideas and made decisions together. Mom was very proud of him and he was known as the most talented and richest one in the family. Before the war broke out, he moved into a new brick house, the first one of its kind in that town. A few months later, the war broke out. The Germans bombed the town and my Uncle and his son, Moishe, ran to safety. They jumped in a ditch that was left open by the builders. My Uncle fell on top of his son to protect him. The son was saved, but my Uncle was hit and killed instantly. My Aunt and their five-year-old daughter remained safely in the house. This little girl, whose name was Glickel, was the love of my Uncle's life. She looked like Shirley Temple with reddish curly hair, dark brown eyes and two dimples in her cheeks. Above all, her voice was

indescribable. My Uncle sang opera-style and he had a lot of plans for that little girl.

My Aunt and her two children left Poland in 1939 to go to the Ukraine. In 1941, Germany occupied Ukraine. With no means to escape, they remained there. Their son, Moishe, and a few friends, escaped the ghetto and lived in hiding. One day he was arrested by the Gestapo and sent on jobs. He was chosen by a German officer to be his private chauffeur. By then, he had Ukrainian documents. For a while, this worked. One day he did not show up for work. He was sick and ran a high fever. The suspicious German officer decided to pay him a visit. From the high fever, Moishe lost control and began to speak Yiddish to the German officer. Without hesitation, the officer took out his pistol and shot him to death. The rest of my Uncle's family vanished in the town of Vinica, Ukraine.

All I can say is that nobody knew pain like Mom did. It saddens me that she did not live longer for the world changed so. What she dreamt of once is now a reality. Everything is "high tech." Her grandchildren and great-grandchildren are getting the best education. They serve G-d and all have yeshiva backgrounds. Dad, too, would be thrilled. Mom, you missed weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, and graduations. You missed the best part of life, but we'll never forget you. Now, it is only Rivka and me, "Rivka, the maiden," as you used to call her. We cherish the memories of you. How I loved being your daughter and seeing how you loved all of us.

Chaim and Yitzhak met their spouses in Poland and remarried. In 1955, the Russians opened the borders for a very short time. Both of them took their families, fled Poland, and settled in Israel. There they met new challenges and new sufferings, but it was home. Chaim had three children and Yitzhak had two. At that time Israel was a very young country, fighting for her survival. All in all, there are enough heart-breaking stories that these two faced in their lives to fill a book. All of this began to affect not only their lives, but their health as well. By now it had been years of separation, but no matter where we were we had one thing in common: that was how to restore out shattered lives, no matter how hard it was.

And the years kept rolling on. By then all of us were married and had families and children to raise. It was 20 years before Mirl and I took our first trip to Israel. I believe that Rivka and her family went to Israel before us. Mirl and I were very excited to see our two lost brothers. All I can say was that it was a very moving experience. It was easier to stop the hugging and kissing than the flow of tears. The first few days we were at a loss for words, but finally we got reacquainted. Then we covered a lot of territory. We reminisced about our lost youth, about what we had missed. They did not even remember some stories, but I am not surprised.

The hardest thing was talking with them about our mother. You could see how much anger and pain they carried in their hearts because they had not seen Mom before she died. They told us it was tearing them apart. After listening to the inhumane punishments and their struggle to survive, it's a miracle that they lived to tell all this. But it came with a price, both of them have health problems I was devastating to watch Chaim who could not control a nasty cough and teary eyes. It gave me the chills. Also, both had stopped smoking, but it was too late. In 1970, at the airport in Israel, when I was saying goodbye to Chaim I knew I would never see

him again. I didn't. Chaim was only 72 when he died. Every time I think of him I think of Mom - she was so proud of him. He gave Mom a lot of aggravations and she disapproved of many of his choices, but in our family, he was the star.

Yitzhak's health began to deteriorate a little later. He was fortunate to come to America a few times. That gave us a chance to become closer, but not to fully recapture the old bond we once had. We tried to reach out to our brothers, but it was not the same as way back when. Has the world changed that much? Have we changed? Did the war change us? Perhaps, it's hard to say. Even with the respect we had for one another, we all lived distant lives. Again, I don't know why, I don't remember when and how we began drifting apart. Mom would have disapproved of it but, as they say, "that's life!"

Among so many heartbreaking things that Yitzhak had to face, one particular story stands out. For one reason or another, the prisoners were shipped from time to time to different places. One of these was Siberia. It's called Nizny-Tagil, and there is no hell to compare with it. Before these prisoners came, there had never been a human being there. The summers were very short, but the winters were horrible. It was a jungle for thousands of miles. Transportation was by helicopter or plane. The prisoners worked long hours, built prisons, wooden cabins and railroads in 40 degrees below zero weather and under the most dangerous and inhumane conditions. They had to face deadly flies, black bears, all kinds of sicknesses, hunger etc. Before going to sleep they were allowed to make a fire outside the bunks to warm up and dry their feet. They all looked like Martians, not humans. One day, one prisoner suddenly went nuts. He snapped and with good reason. Suddenly he said to one of the prisoners, "I don't like the way you look at me." They all carried axes with them for chopping wood. He then took his ax, and with one swipe he chopped another prisoner's head off. The rest of the prisoners were splashed with blood, but the guards looked on and made nothing of it. My brother happened to be sitting near the dead prisoner.

After they finished the job there they were transferred to another place called Vierchny-Tagil. Out of 3,000 prisoners, only 300 survived that journey. Among them was Yitzhak, thank God. Years later, I first began to understand why Chaim and Yitzhak could not talk about the horrors. To survive a Russian jail, especially in the Siberian jungles, is almost impossible. Yitzhak endured eight years of this hell. Mom did not know about these horrors; if she did, she probably would have died long before she actually did.

Mom, forgive me for not covering the whole story of your life in more detail. I don't think I can do it, it hurts too much. Besides, you left such a legacy that it speaks for itself. There will never be another you. I believe that you are in *Gan Eden* (heaven) with all your loved ones. May you all rest in peace. Amen.

Dad's Story

Dad was a calm person. I don't know what made me ask him if he was every angry. Here's a story he told me that made him angry. After sister Ethel passed away and the house went up in smoke, we faced rough times. Dad decided to rent a

fruit orchard for the summer. We would all work hard and hopefully would make money. He then went to the orchard that grew plants and picked a place. It was a very hot summer day. From far away he saw a man in a horse and carriage coming toward him. He signaled to the guy and was about to ask for a ride. The guy slowed down and when he saw a Jew in front of him who wanted a ride, he immediately began hitting him with a whip that was normally used for horses. Dad took his hands away from the wagon, it hurt too much. He always regretted that he didn't jump on the wagon and break the guy's neck. Dad could have done it because he was fairly strong.

Dad was very different than Mom in many ways. I remember when he decided to leave home, Dad seemed to be all for it while Mom had mixed feelings. He, of course, packed his *talit, tefillin* and as many *seforim* (holy books) that he could carry. Watching him carry all this on his back was awful. He was in his late fifties and in fairly good condition - he never suffered from serious illnesses or was in a hospital undergoing surgery - but one couldn't help feeling sorry for him now. The Polish people watched us leave our homes with next to nothing in our hands. They gave us signals that we were marching to our deaths.

Dad was a private person; not much of a talker. He kept most of his feelings to himself. It was easy to figure out his silence. He was thinking of the losses of life and what his life would be in the future with the responsibilities that once were Mom's alone. Now he would have to deal with them himself. He never stopped praying or looking for answers in *chumashim.* (Bible). That was his upbringing that stayed with him all his life. Since he began *cheder* (Hebrew school) at age three, he never changed. He was the eldest of four brothers all of whom had the same education as he, but he was the most loyal and dedicated religious man. In fact, he wore a beard to the end of his life even though his brothers changed. He served God and learned Torah with heart and soul. He was very respected in *shul;* he refused to be called "Rebbe" even though other Rebbes were happy to share his learning.

He never turned one kid against the other and nobody in the world could keep a secret better than he. He shielded himself with religion and used it as a weapon against all obstacles. He would go out of his way to encourage *Yiddishkeit.* He could help prepare a *bris*, give *chuppah kidusha* and organize *minyanim,* even in Russia where it was forbidden. He did all this not for money, just for *mitzvot.* I consider myself lucky to have had him for the 16 years I took care of him. Dad found living with me very comfortable. I did everything to make him feel that my home was his home too. When my daughter Myra was a little girl, she and Dad were very attached to each other. The Jewish language kept them very close. She still remembers him. Unfortunately, my son Bobby was not as fortunate.

Dad didn't become a rich man, but he never felt poor. His richness was the children and with every grandchild that was born, he felt richer. His children were his fortune. I wish I had known more about his early life. Unfortunately, I don't! My grandparents died before I was born. My Dad's family immigrated, some to America and some to Israel. Only two brothers remained in Poland. The Nazis killed one. It bothered my Dad that his three sons did not turn out like him. Dad never smoked; all three of them did. Even though they helped out in the bakery whenever there was a need, two of them absolutely refused to become professional

bakers. Chaim, who was the most talented, somehow remained a baker and carried on the family tradition. Also, while they kept the Jewish traditions, they never kept them the same way that Dad did. It bothered him very much, but he learned to live with it. Maybe the hard life and the difficulties changed their outlook on life. Nevertheless, Dad was loved and respected by all of us.

To survive as a Jew takes more than determination; it takes toughness! I am not that educated, nor am I a historian, but I remember my parents' stories of survival in their lifetime what with the Czarist regime, the Russian revolution, the First World War, the Bolshovik Revoltion, and the Second World War. In those situations Jews suffered the most, yet not only did my parents live through it as Jews, they did it as religious Jews. Where did this toughness come from? I don't know. To my sorrow, in the Second World War others who were as tough did not have a chance to use their toughness; the beautiful, strong, talented Jewish youth did not survive. We all know why; because of a disaster more unspeakable than words can explain. All I know is that no other people in the world is as tough as the Jews.

My parents' generation was caught in this web of disaster. For 2,000 years we prayed for peace and, as of now, not much has changed except that we have a country of our own, Israel, thank God. The bottom line is that the anti-Semites, no matter from which country, carry with them bigotry and brutality. These are their trademarks. Unfortunately nothing has changed. We can fly to the moon and high technology has taken over the world, but we can't destroy barbarism, hate, anti-Semitism etc. On the contrary, these are very much with us. How can we Jews understand the sick minds of Hitler or Stalin. Were they real devils? The world tried to ignore them until almost no one was safe. And the world did not learn from other leaders, before Hitler and Stalin, who also tried to rule the world with iron fists and destruction. I still can't make peace with myself. Why did America and other countries wait so long to open the second front or bomb the iron tracks leading to the concentration camps? I have not found the right answers. What did we learn from it all? Unfortunately, not much.

Dad loved the United States. He was fascinated with television, especially with wrestling. And when Raphael Halpern, the Israeli wrestler, was on TV fighting, his eyes were glued to the set. The English language was very hard for him. He preferred to speak Yiddish. He wanted very much to become a citizen of this country. He studied hard, but only in Yiddish, not in English. His two best friends helped him translate it all into English. All three of them were only five feet tall and in their 80s. Finally the day came to become a citizen. His friends, American citizens, went with him to court, not only to talk for him but to be witnesses as well. My Dad was between them, held under the arms like a chosson (a groom). When the judge looked at them, he said: "Wow, what do we have here, three musketeers?" Every question the judge asked my Dad, the two friends answered. Soon the judge realized what was going on. He then said to the witnesses, "OK, guys, one question he has to answer himself." Of course, Dad did not understand and could not answer, so he failed. He came home angry and ashamed, most of all because the court did not refund the $10 he had paid. However, in Israel he became a citizen with no problem.

In 1960, Dad made *aliyah* to Israel, a lifelong dream of his. His biggest regret, other than Mom not making it to the Promised Land alive, was not having the opportunity to pray in Jerusalem at the *Kotel*, the Wailing Wall. At that time Jerusalem was still divided. Saying goodbye to Dad after 16 years of his living with me was very difficult. I felt that it was for the last time. In 1964, Dad passed away. We who lived in America were not at the funeral. Dad believed that a body of a *niftar* (dead person) should be buried the same day. Mom's old small plaque that was brought from Germany was placed on Dad's monument. It looks as if they never parted.

After 10 years of "gypsying" around the world, we finally came to the land of the free and the home of the brave. Every beginning is hard. Each of us tried harder and harder to become part of the free world. It wasn't easy. We met hardships and bumpy roads, as well as disappointments, but we met all of them head on. America looked so young, healthy, and very interesting. It blended in with our wishes. After a very sick and tough journey, coming off the boats I wanted to take the past and drown it in the deep blue ocean. But that was only another wish. I made a pledge never to be homeless, hungry, or cold again as long as I lived and I have kept the promise.

In America we saw that the sky was the limit. We saw a fresh and promising future. For some of us, it became reality, to others, only a dream. To most survivors, success was not due to their education. All we had was experience; we knew how to survive. We combined *chutzpah*, determination, a lot of perspiration and confidence, and the chemistry worked. Normally, one would say: "Then, what's the problem?" It's simple. Instead of first healing our bodies and minds and the war scars, we ran too fast to catch the bull by its horn. We were going in too many directions at the same time. After all, there was a lot of catching up to do and promises to fulfill. Satisfaction and achievements took over our lives. Americanization and the "melting pot" worked hand in hand. On the surface it looked as if we almost made it. The pain, the yesteryears, the war seemed so long ago. The truth is that all this was only "on hold."

Very soon the survivors began to slow down. Many symptoms from the horror years reappeared. For most of us it was like a wake-up call. Children asked why they didn't have grandparents, uncles, aunts or cousins. No matter how painful, the truth had to be told. Articles, books, movies began to appear. Holocaust museums opened in many countries. Holocaust survivors made tapes and recordings mainly to tell the story firsthand. As it is, we suppressed our bitter experiences for too long. Aging, poor health, loneliness brought back the past. More and more often we talked about that. Children grew up, married and moved away, leaving the nest one by one. And with more time on our hands one could not help but realize that the yesteryears never left us.

We are in a new struggle for survival. In other words, it is a fight to the end. As far as I'm concerned a big disservice was done to the Holocaust survivors; physical and moral support, counseling, even therapy was not given to us. This kind of service was essential. Instead, we had to do it ourselves, with grief. Yes, the war was over but for the survivors it was a never-ending battle. And with all the successes, nothing could heal the scars of war or make us forget the past. Many

Holocaust survivors died young - not even telling their horrible experiences. They took their stories with them to the graves and they will never be told.

It is so sad that many are still fighting the German government for some reparations which are rightfully theirs, but which they have not yet received. Holocaust survivors are dying out in large numbers. The saying goes, "Out of sight, out of mind." Is it going to be like that in years ahead? If so, it will be very sad. Stories of this nature don't get medals but I hope that the second generation and generations to come will honor the memories of those who were so brutally murdered by the Nazis. This is part of the reason why I wrote this book. Mother's death was the biggest blow in my life, but somehow we all survived this tragedy. We made a life for ourselves.

I can't speak for my siblings; I only speak for myself. My life took on a new road of difficulties and sufferings, unlike those endured during the war, but troublesome and painful all the same. As for me, the war never ended. Without going into detail, all I can say is that today my heart is twisted and complicated.
Life is slowly coming to an end. I have decided not only to tell the story of horrors, but the truth and only the truth as long as I am capable of doing so. To write about the Holocaust is the hardest thing I have ever done in my life. This was written with a lot of pain in my heart. I expressed my feeling and a wish in the article "Revenge."

REVENGE

Our horror stories sound like broken records and are, to some degree, nerve wracking to listen to because they are so often repeated. Unfortunately, there is no other way to explain the pain, the shame and the humiliation with which we lived during the war years. It is easier to talk about animals' behavior, you can even add some humor to it. But it is not as easy to talk about humans with animals' behavior. You can't lie to a broken and painful heart.

We have tried to suppress the nightmares and live in a make-believe world. It hardly worked. When memories and conscience keep colliding, too often the unanswered questions pop up. How come we survived and they did not? If we just say, "I don't know," the heart and the mind don't accept this. We wasted so much time searching not only our souls, but the "maybes," the "ifs" and the "buts." But it was all to no avail. Was it all in G-d's hands? Who's to say. In all honesty I have to say I will never understand how Holocaust survivors, under those circumstances, could rebuild a new life. I know for a fact that it all began with a make-believe world that did not even exist, using our last bits of strength, poor health and willpower that wasn't even there. Survivors created the make-believe world for themselves. We had no other choice. We had to prove to the world that we and those that did not survive, were one people. We had to prove this especially to those who locked their doors after the war and the countries that said "not in my backyard," and others that said: "Who cares?"

Is it any wonder that Holocaust survivors delayed telling their horrible experiences, let alone, write about them. We were afraid to be misunderstood, not knowing if anyone would believe us, while others could not care less anyway. Some could not go back and relive the pain once again.

You, Mr. and Mrs. Hate-mongers and Collaborators, let me refresh your memories. You, who prepared a smorgasbord for us of torture, pain, humiliation, and so many different way of killing, you made us run when there were no places to run to. You forced us to hide when there were no hiding places for us. Killing innocent people became your second nature. You, who adopted brutality, bigotry, and for desert, embraced Hitlerism and Stalinism as a way of life, think by now it is all gone and forgotten. No way! You, who fought for your fatherland and for a pure Aryan nation. Germany today is a mixed smorgasbord of all nationalities. Your old soldiers, dead or alive, have Jewish blood in their veins which was taken from new-born Jewish children and toddlers by smashing their heads against brick walls, then drawing the blood out of their little bodies, and using it for the wounded patriots who fought for the Nazis.

All in all, you murdered one-and-a-half million Jewish children. Amongst them were six little boys from my family, from a new-born, whom we did not see or know of his name, to a fifteen-year-old, who survived the war only to be killed by a Polish neighbor who recognized him.

My heart is crying out for revenge. We believe in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, even if it means that the world will go blind and toothless. You have silenced our loved ones forever by murdering them, only because they were Jewish. We, the survivors, cannot be silent. We have a mission; we must deliver it. The victims' message is "tell it all, tell it to the world," but this is done with great difficulty.

Perhaps we began too late, but it has to be done. On the other hand, why be silent or why keep repeating the horrors? Why not? Why seek revenge? Why not? Why talk about it? Why not? Each survivor has to come up with his or her own decision. Is revenge the answer? Not only is it, but for most of us, it is too little, too late already. Looking back we wasted so much time by being silent. Silence adds a lot of pain. We, the Holocaust survivors, who had the experience learned from others who instead lending a hand of friendship or listening to our cries, chose silence. At one point it looked like the world became deaf and that was not easy to cope with.

To the hate-mongers who have no regrets: "Have you met your smorgasbord of misery now?" I hope so!

MY FIRST JOB IN NEW YORK

My first stop after Europe was Ellis Island. From there we, my Dad, my sister Rivka and I, were taken to Colchester, Connecticut, where Dad was reunited with one of his brothers. His two brothers had immigrated to the USA in the 1920s. One of them had a chicken farm. The two American brothers, unlike my Dad, were dressed in modern-style with no *kippot* or beards. Just like Dad we did not feel comfortable. We tried to make a go of it, but it didn't work out.

After one week on the farm we found jobs in a sportswear factory. Many times we had to walk eight miles to and from work although sometimes we were lucky and got a ride. It was not very convenient to say the least. The factory closed for the winter vacation and that's when I decided to go to New York. In spite of my

sister's and Dad's objections, I followed my wish. With $40 in my pocket I did not know what to expect or what was waiting for me there.

I came to New York, the town with its hustle and bustle, the streets full of shoppers and well-wishers (it was Christmas time) and New York with all the glitter looked heavenly. The City was ready to welcome the New Year off 1950. Everyone looked so happy and carefree as if the world was becoming younger and healthier. It even gave me a few intimations of hope. Soon I found out that this same City could become Hell.

The first stop was to see my sister Mirl and her family who lived in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Mirl was the mother of a small child, my brother-in-law was unemployed and I knew immediately that help would not come from them. I rented a bed to sleep on in the same building where my sister lived and shared the bedroom with an old lady who rented the apartment. I paid her $28 for the month with no place in which to cook and was allowed to take only one shower a week and that one before Shabbos.

I was left with $12 in my pocket and without wasting time I began to walk the streets of New York looking for work. I soon found out what it meant not to have help from anybody and with a heavy Polish accent, embroidered with the British English I had learned in Germany, I hit a stone wall. Things did not change for quite a while. I wrote a letter to my sister almost telling her the truth. She wrote me, begging me to come back, telling me that my sewing machine was not being used and I could get my job back. She said, "If you die on the streets of New York we may never know what happened to you."

I could see she had been crying. The words on the letter were smeared with her tears, but I had no intention of going back, come what may. The month was not up yet but the landlady wanted to get paid because she saw that I didn't have a job and she worried about her rent money. I figured out how much it was per day and paid her for 10 days more. By then I was left with next to nothing. I lived on 50 cents a day which allowed me to buy three rolls, three apples, one cup of coffee and left 20 cents over for transportation.

Failing to et a job on my own, I felt I couldn't take it anymore. The options that I thought of would lead me to disaster. It was the end of January, the weather was cold, and I was dressed in a summer jacket and open shoes as though it was May. I began to feel sorry for myself. I was looking for a solution, even considering ending my life. I could not go on any longer. I also felt sorry for the rest of my family. We were still mourning Mom's death - it was only 14 months ago when we lost her. And now, could I commit suicide or end my life? I couldn't go through with it.

It was a mixed rainy and snowy day and I was so cold I couldn't stop shivering. I became hysterical. People passing me by stopped and asked me all kinds of questions. I couldn't answer. Some stopped and stared at me, then shook their heads in disbelief. One middle-aged man, walking home from work, stopped, looked at me, and asked me why I was crying. With a throat full of tears I could not speak. He begged me to calm down. I finally squeezed out a few words and told him that I needed a job, badly. "Where do you live?" he asked. When I told him, he yelled out "My G-d, I live across the street!"

This I will never forget. He took my hand. I was frozen and shaking like a leaf. He offered me coffee and I told him that I wanted to go home. He lived with his wife and his mother-in-law in an old house. His children were all married and on their own. Immediately he went to the telephone to call his friends and relatives asking them to help. By then He already knew a little bit about me. About midnight a promise of a job came through. He gave me a piece of paper with an address on it and I didn't sleep all night from the excitement.

In the morning I was the first one out of the house. I found the place he had sent me to. I was a real sweatshop. Two men ran this place, a father and son, who did not get along. I stood there for three hours without a "yes" or a "no." The son was an ex-G.I. who was stationed in Europe during the war. On my behalf he asked his father, rather begged him, to give me a job. Just before I was to leave the old man came over to me and with his finger pointed to a sewing machine telling me that this job was offered on a trial basis only. To me it looked like no job, but then came Friday, and an envelope with cash was given to me. The boss said that could only pay$25 for a 40-hour week. I said, "That's fine."

Walking home I said to myself that the boss just threw $5 a week out of the window; $20 would have been fine! When I came home and took shower, I began to sing. The landlady asked, "Why are you so happy. Did you have a date with Rockefeller?" I answered, "Exactly!"

Well, say what you want, but I still feel that this is an American success story.

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